IN THE PIT WITH PIPER

"Rowdy" Roddy Piper

with Robert Picarello

BERKLEY BOULEVARD BOOKS, NEW YORK

I would like to dedicate this book to all of my deceased Frat Brothers, including:

Owen Hart
Adrian Adonis
Ravishing Ric Rude
Dino Bravo
Brian Pillman
Jay "The Alaskan" York
Kerry Von Erich
David Von Erich
Mike Von Erich
Chris Von Erich
Andre the Giant
Art Barr
Johnny Valentine
Rick McGraw
Gorilla Monsoon
Wahoo McDaniel
Davey "Boy" Smith
Lou Thesz

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Foreword

IN this business, there aren't too many real people. Roddy Piper is definitely one of the real ones.

A stand-up guy, Roddy always shook everyone's hand in the dressing room—big, small, old, and young. He was polite and different from all the big names I ever met.

When I got to the WWF in '84, Roddy was already on top of the card as their number one heel. He didn't have to give me the time of day—but he did.

Long before cliques in wrestling had become a major angle, the big clique was Don Muraco, Bob Orton, Adrian Adonis, Mr. Fuji, and Roddy. They didn't hang out together for "political" reasons but for comradeship. One night, after a Hart Foundation tag match, Roddy invited Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart and me up to a hotel room for a beer with the boys, and they let us into the fold. It was a privilege to sit with these top stars, soaking up their advice on wrestlers, wrestling, psychology, angles, and territories. The camaraderie in those lonely hotel rooms provided some of the most insightful and significant lessons a young apprentice like me would ever get.

One day I mentioned to Roddy that my dad had some relatives on his side by the name of Toombs, Roddy's real last name. As it turned out, Roddy is from Saskatoon, as is my father, Stu, and we found it curious that in North Dakota the Harts and the Toombs were indeed blood-related. To what extent nobody knew. Ever since this discovery, Roddy and I have referred to each other as "Cuz."

One of the greatest moments of my career was when I challenged Roddy for the WWF Intercontinental title at *WrestleMania VIII* in Indianapolis. We'd never really had any matches together, and to have one this big, in the sold-out Hoosierdome, plus millions more watching live around the world on Pay-Per-View, was going to be a challenge. Roddy had an indifference to pain, working as hard as anyone I ever knew, and at *WrestleMania VIII* I knew he bore the brunt of it for me. To win the Intercontinental title from my mentor was an amazing accomplishment for me.

As the years went by, I found myself in numerous situations where I desperately needed some good advice, and I often joked about shining a spotlight in the sky like Batman and Roddy would always be there. I could always trust Roddy, knowing that his advice wasn't just good, it was the best. I was able to work my way up in the business, forever grateful for his counsel.

Being a wrestler was like being in a tribe. The best thing that any of us had going was the feeling of brotherhood we shared. Too many wrestlers end up as wrestling tragedies. For me, I followed Roddy like a Sioux brave followed Crazy Horse. He was a real warrior, who could truly lay claim to being a chief.

In the world of professional wrestling, the true giants don't always face one another, sometimes they stand side by side facing the world.

Thanks, Roddy, for being a true friend and hero.

And that's a shoot.

—Bret "The Hitman" Hart

Preface

MICK Foley once said to me on the Larry King show, "Piper, it's usually the guys that didn't make it that are bitter. Why are you so bitter?"

Mick brought up the point that I couldn't see the trees for the forest, and for this I'm forever grateful. As you read you might get the same idea, but I'm going to try and take you back with me on what's been a wild, wacky, and glorious journey as a professional wrestler.

I love the sport of professional wrestling and all that it has given me. It's allowed me to see the world, earn a decent living, raise a beautiful family, and meet lots of great and interesting people. It has also taught me to have the utmost respect for anyone who has ever stepped foot in a professional wrestling ring. I know firsthand that it ain't easy. The athlete in you takes a physical pounding seven days a week from all the wrestling you're doing all over the world, while your brain takes a mental beating from all the time you spend alone on the road away from your family and home.

As you'll find out in my book, there were many times in my life when I didn't see the green of the trees that Mick was talking about because I was always on the run—and it's very hard to notice anything in life when you're running with your head down. But my forefathers took me in and not only taught me how to wrestle, but also how to walk through life with my head up and become some*body. I am forever grateful to them for passing this knowledge on* to me, so that's one of the reasons I decided to sit down and pen this book. *In the Pit with Piper* allows me to get my story out there for everyone to read and enjoy, and it also allows me to pass some knowledge down to people who are interested in getting into the business. They can read and learn about the hard road that I traveled to break into the rough and tough sport.

I started to write this book two years ago, and boy, let me tell you, it's been a learning experience. I went through six people before I found the crew to help me get everything right. I have tried to get all the people, places, names, and facts correct, as I did the entire book from memory, and I was as honest as I can be.

But I have to tell you, the deeper and further I went back in my life and career, the harder the task became. To be honest, I almost gave up three times, but one night I got a call from a good friend, Bob Friedman, who is the vice president of Celebrity Placement in Detroit. After screening a hundred literary agencies for me, he came up with Warwick Associates, operated by a wonderful team of people headed by Simon Warwick-Smith and Patty Vadinsky, who took me on as a client. Not only did they dive into the project headfirst with me, but they baby-sat me through the entire process. Eventually, Simon and Patty got me a deal with Penguin Putnam books to publish my work, and here I am 100,000 words later. Thank you to a fine editor, Kelly Sinanis. We may never have gotten this book published if she hadn't battled for us. I must also give thanks and gratitude to writer Rob Picarello for his countless hours of hard work and sleepless nights in helping me write this book. Without him, this project would never have gotten done, and he is truly one of the finest in his field and one of the most devoted workers I have ever met. Thank you, Rob.

These people are responsible for helping me get the book out of my head and onto the shelf, and for this I am truly grateful.

Also, this book would not be possible if not for people like Leo Garibaldi, Gene LeBell, and Red Bastien (the best man at my wedding), who took me under their wings as a young misfit. These men, along with so many other greats from their generation, allowed me to learn the art of wrestling well enough so I could earn a living from it. My forefathers had me in school 24/7 teaching me the ropes in both my life and my sport.

Then there are my Frat Brothers who stood toe-to-toe with me through the good times and the bad. Rick Martel, Greg Valentine, Sergeant Slaughter, Don Muraco, Bob Orton, Bret Hart, Mr. Fuji, Andre the Giant, Ric Flair, and even my old nemesis, Hulk Hogan. Once you have done battle with someone long enough, there grows a strong, silent bond and a mutual respect.

There are two people who do not get enough credit for their contributions who also need to be acknowledged. Cyndi Lauper and her tireless manager, Dave Wolff, were so instrumental in bringing wrestling into the mainstream. I am a big fan of both of these people and I know how important their roles were in getting the wrestling boom started. I was there to witness what these two wonderful people did, and I thank them.

I also must give credit where credit is due. Although I rag on him and we disagree *a lot,* Vince McMahon deserves some praise. If he had not seen and seized the opportunity, putting everything on the line for wrestling, I would not have the notoriety that I do today. Vince McMahon Jr., I thank you.

However, the person who not only helped me through the toughest parts of my career but also taught me how to become a decent human being is my beautiful wife, Kitty, whom I have been with for twenty-four years. If God were to line up all the girls in the world for me and ask me to pick a wife, I would still pick Kitty. She is my life. While I was lucky enough to marry Kitty, she also blessed me with my support group, my beautiful children: Anastasia, Ariel, Colton, and Falon, whom I have always lovingly called my "Corn Muffin." They all have exceeded my highest expectations and they all have my undying and unconditional love.

Last but not least, my friend and business associate Lewis Rach for his relentless patience, and for putting up with my bullshit and never wavering. On January 31, 2002, Lewis became the only man I don't know how I'm ever going to be able to pay back, literally saving my life by getting me to Cedars-Sinai Hospital when I was clinically dead after a terrible car accident.

From one true friend to another, thank you, Lewis.

Finally, this book goes out to my fans who have watched me grow up before their very eyes every night. From the bottom of my heart I thank you all. May you all be in heaven a half hour before the devil even knows you're dead.

Ever Forward,
Roddy Piper

1

Roddy Piper Is Born

MOST normal people come into the world on a specific day of a specific month during a specific year. Not me. While I was born Roderick George Toombs on April 17, 1954, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, I didn't truly come to life until fifteen years later when I found my true calling—pro wrestling—which would eventually give me my real identity of "Rowdy" Roddy Piper.

I took up the rough and tough sport in 1969, but before that I was an outcast in society who was going nowhere fast. The only thing I was good at was playing the bagpipes. To tell you the truth, I don't know why I started playing the instrument. Though my father was Scottish and my mother was from Ireland, I didn't learn from them how to play the bagpipes. I was really young—about five or six—and living on an Indian reservation called The Pas in Manitoba when I started playing the pipes, and I don't even recall who introduced me to them. I don't think it was one of my neighbors because I was the only white kid living on the reservation and I can't imagine myself playing the bagpipes and dancing around a fire with fourteen Apaches. Why didn't I pick the guitar and become the next Eric Clapton or choose the drums and become a great drummer like Ringo Starr? No. God gave me the bagpipes, so that made me an underdog from the beginning, because you know what comes with the bagpipes—a kilt—not a dress, but a kilt! But while there is nobody alive who can help me solve the mystery of when and how I started playing, no one can dispute that I'm good on the pipes.

At thirteen, I left home and decided to give it a go on my own. I hitchhiked from place to place and I played my bagpipes, leaving my case open, hoping to make a quarter, which would allow me to get into a youth hostel. But I was never in one place for a very long time. I was constantly on the move, and wherever I went, my bagpipes followed. One year the two of us teamed up with a band called Keber Fe and took part in a competition in Toronto at the C&E Gardens. We were up against the best pipe bands from around the globe, and believe it or not, we came in fifth—in the world. Pretty impressive for someone who isn't sure why he started playing the instrument in the first place, don't you think?

But the rest of my early memories aren't as special. As a matter of fact, they're kind of shitty. To put it plainly, I was a delinquent who had a knack for finding trouble, and even when I wasn't trying, trouble found me. Now, even though I don't agree with most of Canada's rules, I do have a lot of respect for the country, especially since the powers that be kept me out of reform school. You see, Canada had a couple of experimental programs that tried to put juvenile delinquents on the straight and narrow, and I became the country's white mouse for quite a few of them.

One of the first years I was in school, I was enrolled in a program in which the teachers were teaching us math and spelling through some new methods. Well, unfortunately for me, none of them worked. To this day I still can't spell a word and the only time I can add is when a promoter is paying me. So, you see, I didn't have a very good crack at school from the beginning. I would have loved to stay in and get an education and become a psychologist—that's what I really wanted to be. But years later the only Yale degree I would get would be ADD.

Another program I got involved in was one in which the Canadian government actually put me in boot camp with the Canadian Armed Forces. I had to put in six weeks of basic training and then show up once a month for a year until I was finished with the program, which would give me an honorable discharge. I never imagined myself wearing a uniform and serving my country, but this training turned out to be a good thing for me. It kept me off the streets and out of trouble for a while and instilled a powerful belief in discipline in me that has stayed with me until this very day. The army also taught me to be an expert marksman. I became good with a machine gun and even better with a knife—all things a juvenile delinquent should learn. It was organized fighting—and I liked it!

After I received my honorable discharge, I was once again back to my nomadic life, living in hostels or on the streets. Like I said, in my travels as a teen, I tried as best as I could to stay in school and get an education. Also in my travels, I got involved in school athletics. I started playing sports like football, basketball, and hockey, but even though I was a natural athlete, I could never have made a dime off any one of those sports. But one sport I tried and liked was wrestling. I picked up on it quickly, maybe because my father and uncle were both amateur boxers and it was in the blood. As a matter of fact, when I was living at home, they used to take me down to the basement and try to teach me about boxing and also how to protect myself. Wrestling also came naturally to me because I'd been fighting all my life.

One of the youth hostels that I got into had a Police Athletic League and an amateur wrestling coach. From the very first time I locked up with someone, I excelled on the mat. At the age of fifteen, I won the 167-pound Amateur Wrestling Championship of Manitoba. This was quite an accomplishment and confidence booster for me because, believe it or not, I was a shy reserved kid who didn't look for any attention. When I entered this tournament I had no idea what to expect, especially after I got my ass kicked in my very first match against an opponent who was not only two weight classes above me, but who also had a build that resembled Chris Benoit's.

But surprisingly enough, I won all my remaining matches, and as luck would have it, I met up with the Benoit-like wrestler again in the finals. Not expecting to win the match, I wrestled defensively against my opponent in the first round because I felt I lacked the size, experience, and mostly the confidence that was needed to pull off a victory. But something happened in the second round that not only turned the finals around, but also my wrestling career. I hip-tossed my ripped foe and heard him grunt and groan as he landed. This gave me the boost I needed, as I now realized that I had a chance. In the third round, I had confidence to go on the attack and even got the grappler in a half nelson. But just as the ref was counting the guy out, the bell rang, ending the round and match. I was pissed because I thought I had the pin when the bell rang and I also thought I had lost the match. But to my surprise the ref came over and raised my arm in victory, and this gave me all the confidence in the world to go after what I wanted for the rest of my life.

One of my friends was enrolled in a professional wrestling school run by a guy named Tony Candello, who was a barber by trade. My friend said, "Why don't you come on by and see what's going on?" So I went and was introduced to Candello. My friend told his teacher that I was an amateur wrestling champion and dollar signs must have flashed before this guy's eyes. You see, Candello not only ran this pro wrestling school, he was also a renegade, outlaw promoter who was looking to make a buck. He started making me all kinds of promises, and told me to sign a contract and he would turn me into a professional wrestler. At first I went along with this guy, but after talking to him some more, I realized he was just trying to get money out of me, which was like trying to get blood out of a stone because I certainly didn't have any money. By this time I had been on the streets for two years and I wasn't about to be anybody's fool. When he left the room, I stole the signed contract out of his briefcase, but still got booked on a wrestling card because they thought I went to the school.

The first professional event that I took part in was way up in the tundra for a local promoter named Al Tomko in Churchill, Manitoba. Tomko packed into his van his lineup for the evening—which included me and five other scary-looking wrestlers, who could all rival the local Sasquatch in looks and size, and two lady midget wrestlers, who had nice long hair on their legs, which I guess kept them warm during the harsh winters. We took the van to the airport, where a twin-engine pontoon airplane was waiting for us and was going to drop us off at the pond nearest our destination in Churchill. As the plane was going up, one of the midgets nudged me and pointed out that there was oil coming out of the left engine. Not wanting to alarm anyone and also being the new kid on the block, I gracefully went up to the pilot and informed him that the left engine was leaking oil. Without missing a beat, the calm, cool, and collected plane flier answered me: "Yeah, I know. She leaks a bit. I've been meaning to get that fixed."

Needless to say, we made it to our destination, which was a lumber camp that was filled with the loneliest, nastiest-looking bunch of lumberjacks that I had ever seen in my life. These guys, who Tomko informed me loved the sight of blood, made our group look like a bunch of raving beauties.

The setup was even worse looking than the lumberjacks. There was no wrestling ring, just some mats on the cold, hard floor, and no chairs, just some broken-down wooden stools in the kitchen area where the lumberjacks ate. But we still managed to put on a good card for the jacks, who left the place smiling from ear to ear, as they got to see some good matches and some bloodshed. Unfortunately for me, the blood being lost was mine. But I didn't care. As long as Tomko gave me my fifteen bucks for the night, I was happy.

We made our way back to the plane, and there was our pilot with a big can of oil, filling up that engine again so he could fly us back. When we landed, we all piled back into the van and made our way to find a place to sleep for the night. I was so sore and achy that I couldn't wait to take a shower and crawl into bed. After driving for some time, Tomko pulled up and stopped in a state park and said: "All right. Here we are." Now I was wondering what was going on. Did someone have to go to the bathroom? Nope. Turns out the park was going to be our home for the night. The ladies had the luxury of sleeping in the van, while us guys had to find a comfortable spot outside among the stars and nature.

Al, being the caring promoter that he was, took it upon himself to build us a campfire to keep us warm while we searched for our beds for the evening. I chose the most comfortable picnic table that I could find and tried to catch some sleep after my first long night as a pro wrestler in the "big leagues." I thought the adventure was going to be put to rest right there on the picnic table, but it was only beginning.

I got up in the middle of the night to use the Porta Potti, and just as I was sitting down to do my business, I heard lots of commotion and what sounded like a roar coming from outside the stall. I pulled open the door a little, only to see a huge creature running around our camp. At first I thought nothing of it, thinking it was just one of our wrestlers taking a piss and having some laughs. But the joke would be on me. A few moments later I found my world turned upside down when the Porta Potti was sent flying, launching shit and me into the air.

When I got up off the ground, I heard everybody yelling at me to get into the van because there was a wild bear running loose in our camp. With my pants down to my ankles, I ran as fast as I could to catch up with the group and jumped, bare-assed, into the moving van, narrowly escaping the claws of the wild beast. But just when I thought I was safe, Tomko and the group tossed me back out of the van because I stank—not to mention the shit that was now all over the seats in Al's van. Ah yes, I was already enjoying life as a pro wrestler.

Tomko then allowed me to live in his gym, and the only thing I had to do in order to stay there was help keep the place nice and clean. My time spent in the gym was memorable, because not only did I have the pleasure of working out with some of the biggest and best wrestlers on the circuit, I also had quite a few laughs.

For instance, one time Al wanted me to repaint some of the equipment that had become worn and old looking from all the use and abuse over the years. So I took some paint and proceeded to give the dumbbells and plates a fresh coat of royal blue, using some white to paint the numbers. But as a joke, I repainted them all the wrong weights. I painted twenty-five pounds on the forty-pound dumbbells and eighty pounds on the ninety-five-pound dumbbells.

You can imagine how much I laughed watching five-hundred-pound bench-pressers like Superstar Billy Graham and Hercules Cortez trying to figure out, "What's wrong with me today?!" The confusion on their faces alone was priceless, although short-lived. You see these forefathers of mine weren't dumb. They made Tomko weigh the dumbbells. After they figured out what had happened, they found their own brand of humor, dragging me across the speed bumps of the mat, again and again and again, and practicing their best moves on me. Quite honestly, they beat the shit out of me. The incident not only gave me another lesson in humility, it also left me out on the street again.

But with all the wrestling I was doing, I was able to rent a room of my own for twenty-five dollars a month from a lady in Winnipeg named Melanie. She was always singing that song "I've got a brand new pair of roller skates, you've got a brand new key . . ." However, she was over three-hundred pounds and I didn't ever want to know if the key fit! Anyway, Melanie rented me her front porch. I had a hot plate, a bed, and two candles on the wall. Now, Winnipeg is a city where the temperature sometimes drops to sixty below, and I was sleeping on a porch! But it was better than being on the streets.

I enrolled in a school that wasn't too far away from my place. Even though I was never really good with books, I wanted to get an education. I tried to stay in school, but it was hard. I was an outcast because with all the moving around I did, I was always the new kid in class. That first day was undoubtedly the toughest. I was always nervous when I had to walk into a room filled with strangers and introduce myself. It became twice as hard when I started wrestling.

So now I walk into the new classroom, and because I'm wrestling every night, I'm pretty marked up. Half of my face is raw, and I walk in and everybody turns to stare at me, and they're wondering "Who is this guy?" And I don't want them to ask any questions. I don't want them to know what I'm doing. I mean, if they ask me what school I came from, what am I going to do, give them a list? And if they ask me where I live, what do I say? On a porch, like a dog? So I just kept to myself, and everyone started thinking I was some tough guy, coming to school with scars and bruises all over my body. No one knew me well enough to know what I did outside of school—hell, I don't even think they knew my name. And even if they did know my name and had the nerve to ask me questions, I didn't give them direct answers because I didn't want anyone to know my business.

I was always hiding behind some kind of mask. But the truth of the matter is that Roddy Piper was always a scared-to-death coward who was extremely introverted and insecure. I had nothing in common with any of these kids and I didn't know what to say to them. There were many times back then when I was scared to death—and there were many times after that when I was scared shitless, too—but I learned over time that it was okay to be afraid. What's not okay is having those emotions stop you from doing what you want to do.

My education came to a screeching halt on the day I was supposed to take part in my first pro match in a big-time league, the American Wrestling Association. I was all excited during the day because not only was I going to take part in an AWA event, I was also going to be making twenty-five bucks for the bout—a ten-dollar bump up from my other matches. But I almost didn't make the match in the Winnipeg Arena that night because I had gotten into trouble during the day with four or five other students and we all had to stay after school.

I don't ~~remember~~ what we did to get punished, but I do remember why I walked out on school for good on that day. As I sat at my desk thinking about the night's match, my teacher ordered me up to the front of the classroom to help the other detained students clean the blackboard. When I approached her desk, she handed me a brush and sarcastically asked me if I had somewhere better to be. I answered her by saying, "Yeah, I do. I can see me telling the Crusher tonight why I was late for the match, that I was a bad boy in school and had to stay after and clean the blackboards."

Well, I made it through the afternoon and raced to get ready for the match. This was big-time for me, and I had told all my friends about it. My pipe-band buddies had decided they would help me make a grand entrance. I was going to wear my plaid trunks and these ridiculous high-topped green boots, and my full pipe band, all wearing kilts, would be wailing away as I stepped into the ring. On my way to the arena, I snuck into the Marlboro Hotel, a familiar stomping ground for me. I was always slipping into that hotel at night, hunting down room-service trays that guests had chucked out in the hall—they left a lot of good food on those trays. But on this night, I wasn't looking for a meal. I stole a wicker basket, which I was also going to use on my way into the ring that night. I wanted to fill it with roses, but I couldn't afford them, so I settled for dandelions that I picked out of the grass.

After all the rushing around, I managed to get to the arena an hour before the match and I found out that I was facing Larry Hennig. Hennig was thirty-five years old and weighed about 320 pounds. He looked like a Viking; he had no neck, and there was hair growing out of his ears, nose, and teeth. He had just lost the World Heavyweight Championship, and this was his next fight, and boy was he mad. He growled to the promoter, "Go tell that kid, 'Just be like a Greyhound bus and leave the driving to us.' " I had no idea what was going on. Being the lanky and inexperienced wrestler that I was, I wasn't going to argue with a guy who was twice my age, not to mention twice my size.

Besides, this was big stuff. Not only was the money good, the AWA was the big time, where so many wrestling greats had passed through the promotion. Grapplers like Superstar Billy Graham, Dusty Rhodes, Billy Robinson, Nick Bockwinkle, Verne Gagne, Ric Flair, Sergeant Slaughter, and Hulk Hogan, just to name a few, at one time or another, graced these mats. I went there with the full intention of giving it my best shot, hoping that somehow I would get noticed.

My entrance alone that night got me noticed. I came into the arena led by a full wailing pipe band—four pipers, two snares, and a bass drummer wearing a big, fuzzy hat with a pint of scotch stuck in the hole of it, as tradition always dictated. Me, I was 167 pounds soaking wet, in the middle of these guys, with my basket of dandelions, which I was sharing with the crowd, to their complete disbelief.

As I approached the ring apron, the announcer, who didn't know me from Adam—all he knew was that my name was Roddy—said: "Ladies and gentlemen, coming to the ring at one-hundred and sixty-seven pounds, Roddy, uh, the, uh, Piper."

Thus the birth of Roddy Piper!

They were shocked; they had never seen anything like it. This was all new to the audience and to Hennig and to me. There were no grand entrances in those days. There was no music blaring from the arena speakers or pyrotechnics all around. Wrestlers just used to walk into the ring ready to fight. I'll never forget the look on Hennig's face when I finally stepped through the ropes. If looks could kill, I would have been dead twice over before the bell even rang. As I got into the ring, all I saw was a large human mass with lightning coming out of his eyes and thunder coming out of his ass. The bell rang, and the next thing I knew, Hennig had snatched me as fast as a rattlesnake and hit me so hard I fell backward. I was falling through the ropes and would have hit my head on the concrete if it hadn't been for the kindhearted Hennig. He reached through the ropes and grabbed me by the hair, ripping some of it out as he saved my life, only to pull me back in the ring and give me his finishing hold, called "The Ax," and then cover me. Figure that it takes a three-count in order to beat a guy, and add another seven seconds to that, and you have my first world record in professional wrestling. I have the honor of being beaten in the shortest amount of time in Winnipeg Arena history—ten seconds!

I left the ring and went back to the locker room feeling dejected. My pipe band was gone; they had left the arena not too proud of my performance. I wasn't too thrilled about what happened that night either. My nose was broken and I was ashamed of myself because I thought I was a tough guy. As I sat there sulking with my head between my legs, Tomko came up to me, and all I remember seeing were his penny loafers. I didn't look up because I thought he was going to bawl me out or at least duke me out of my two bits, but instead he said, "Kid, you did great! How'd you like to go to Kansas City?" I said, "Is Larry Hennig going to be there?" And he said, "No, no, don't worry. We won't overmatch you again."

So he slipped me across the border to wrestle. Tomko had been frequently going across the border to matches in the United States, and he put me in the backseat of his Lincoln Continental and threw a couple of blankets over me. When we got to the border patrol he played me off as his son, saying, "Yeah, I got my son with me. He's always sleeping, the lazy kid," and remarkably they let us through without a problem.

Our first stop across the border was a very old, old-fashioned hotel called the Calhoun Beach Hotel, where my elders often provided studio wrestling for people as entertainment. I grappled with Superstar Billy Graham and his huge twenty-four-inch arms, and against many other wrestlers, all of whom outweighed me by at least a hundred pounds. If you go back and look at some of the tapes of these old wrestling broadcasts, you'll see I was the guy that was always being squished! They just beat the shit out of me every chance they had, and seemed to enjoy it more and more each time. One night in the locker room after a match, Superstar joked and said to me, "Sorry we were a little short on TV time. Next time I'll give you more time, kid." I said in reply: "Yeah, right." I knew that Superstar didn't care how quick I lost the match or how much air time I had. Graham caught on that I wasn't buying his bullshit and started laughing. It was my first "ribbing on the square" (which you'll learn more about in chapter 3) experience, and the first time I called anybody on anything. But at this time in my life, I realized that I wasn't the brave young lad that I'd thought I was. I was a coward. I feared everything, therefore I feared nothing, and that's why I showed up.

Besides being a punch dummy in the ring, I was also known as a resourceful fellow who could get anything the guys needed, from the lady at the bar to a room at a sold-out motel. Basically, I was a promoter's dream. Outside of our group, no one knew I existed, or cared. If I died, they'd move on to the next guy, and if I got busted, they'd deny knowing me. The only good thing for me was the experience of dealing with different kinds of people, from saints to serial killers, and I started not to scare too easily.

But what other choice did I have? I was a teenager who had no education, no close friends or family members to help me out, and no driver's license to help me get around. I relied on all these guys to help mold me into someone who was going to be successful. Whatever they wanted or needed me to do I was going to do it, no questions asked. If they needed me to go over the border with them for a match and would say, "Be there at three," I made sure I was there by five to three.

In my early years in the sport, I was shuffled around from one guy to another, and I had to give them one cent per mile for gas in order to pay for a ride. At this time gas was really expensive. There was a gas shortage in effect and you could only buy it according to your license plate—odd numbers on some days, even numbers on others. Well, if we were driving from Winnipeg, Manitoba, to Minneapolis, which is five hundred miles, we certainly couldn't make that trip just on one full tank. So when we ran out of gas, we'd fill up using a "six-foot credit card." What's that, you ask? It's a garden hose. I would sneak out at night and siphon gas from whatever vehicle I could find. The farms were usually the best places to hit. All the farmers had these huge gas cans that they used for their tractors, and I would fill those up and then put the gas in our car.

The only drawback was that farmers also usually had German Shepherds, and unfortunately I don't speak German. You try running with two full five-gallon gas cans with dogs biting at your heels. Those mutts would chase after me, and I'd knock the shit out of them with that garden hose. I knew that if I didn't get back to the car with gas, I'd be the one getting the beating.

Here's another example of how I was treated (or mistreated) at the time: During the wintertime when we were driving from gig to gig, the guys would put the heat on high enough so that the warmth would reach only their feet. I would be alone in the backseat freezing my balls off. One time, it had to be about 30 below outside and I was curled up in the back with my bologna sandwich and my bottle of 7UP, trying to stay warm, and the guys were busting my chops, saying, "Ah, damn, it's so hot up here." About halfway through the drive, my bottle of pop exploded all over me, leaving me colder than I was before—and without a drink for my lunch! Ah, the life of a professional wrestler.

Being the new kid on the block, I had to pay my dues like everyone else had done before me, but I also found the family and support I had never had as a kid. I didn't realize it at the time, especially when certain guys were ribbing me, but I'll never forget what guys like Bulldog Bob Brown, Ken Ramie, Lord Alfred Hayes, the Viking, Ronnie Etchinson, and Maurice Mad Dog Vachon did for me. These guys all took me in like one of their own and made me who I am today.

At one time or another, Ramie, Hayes, the Viking, or Etchinson would get on me because I was so young and played the bagpipes and I wore a kilt. They would tease me and pretend to come on to me.

Once I walked into an empty dressing room. All of a sudden the bathroom stall door flies open and there's Ramie sitting on the can playing with his pipe. I looked around and I realized there was nobody there but him and me. Now, to play a joke, there has to be an audience to get a laugh out of it—there has to be at least three to tango, doesn't there? But there was no third party laughing in a corner. It was just me and him. I really thought he was coming on to me.

A few days later, Lord Alfred Hayes, who is hung like a horse, comes up to me as I'm getting out of the shower. He's naked and starts running after me, swinging his dick and yelling "Roddy, Roddy." He's twirling that thing around like Roy Rogers trying to lasso Dale Evans.

Another night, I'm standing in the dressing room in Kansas City and Bob Geigel, a great amateur and professional wrestler and promoter, calls me over. "Hey, kid, I want to talk to you." I was very interested to hear what he had to say about wrestling; I was always looking to get advice from guys who'd been around for a while and were top-notch wrestlers.

I was so engrossed in what Mr. Geigel was saying that I tuned out everyone and everything around me. I was so distracted by Geigel that I was leaning against a bench with my hand behind me and somebody put something in it without me even realizing it. Finally Mr. Geigel finishes talking, and I notice that something is in my hand, so I squeeze it a few times, and turn around to see that it's Lord Alfred Hayes's donkey-size penis. My mentors were now rolling around on the floor laughing at me, as this whole thing had been a setup.

Me, I felt humiliated, hurt, embarrassed, and angered all at once. You've got to understand, I had been living on the streets for two years. When you're on the street, you're constantly fighting not to get raped. I thought I was away from all that. I thought I was in a room with a bunch of men I could trust, but now I didn't know what to think. And I couldn't do anything, because there was nobody in this group who I could beat up. So what the hell was I going to do? I got to the point where I wouldn't shower in the same room as them anymore. I would get to the arena, change into my kilt in the car, then wait outside until it was my turn to go on. Then, after I finished, I would go back outside the arena to wait for my ride. If we didn't hit a gym along our bookings route where I could shower, I would stay dirty because I was convinced that these guys were a bunch of queers.

Looking back, I realize this is when I officially became accepted into the world of professional wrestling. You see, after a few months, there was the "stink factor" again for the second time in my life. But unlike the first time, when I stunk up the van, these wrestlers didn't abandon me. My mentors realized how much damage they had done to me and they wanted to make things right. One night Geigel came up to me and told me not to take life so seriously, and that "the boys are just jerking around!" I said, "*That's* my problem." He told me, "If they didn't mess with you, it would mean they didn't like you!" I thought to myself, "Do they have to like me *this* much?"

In my very early years, these men, one at a time or sometimes in a group, had me in school twenty-four hours a day. They taught me everything, starting with the basics, the three W's—wrestling, women, and whiskey. They wanted to make sure that I had a proper education. They also used me to get dates for them. They lovingly called me "bait." We'd go out and all these thirty-five-year-old guys with scars all over their faces would use me to attract women they wanted to meet. They'd see a woman they liked, and would say, "Go get that one for me," and I'd bring her over to the table. Whenever we wrestled in Dallas, Fritz Von Erich would have me take out a fire marshal's daughter so he could pack more people into the arena than the fire laws would allow. These were the types of things

I had to do when I was a young professional wrestler. Ain't life great?!

One wrestler in particular who left a lasting impression on me during this time was a man named Ivan the Terrible. This guy was big and burly and he was always dressed in a nice suit and wore a hat like Frank Sinatra. Just looking at him was enough to set your teeth chattering, knees knocking and bring a tear to a glass eye—I had to take a trip with him from Kansas City to Wichita.

Ivan didn't talk to me for the first 150 miles of the trip—I mean he didn't say two words. The only sounds that were heard in the car—a Cadillac—came out of the radio speakers; Ivan loved to listen to talk radio. After being on the road for about three hours, he finally turned to me and asked, "Are you hungry?" I told him I was and he pulled over to an old-fashioned roadside diner. He parked the car and got out, telling me to go inside five minutes after him. What? I was crushed! I almost cried. Had I done something wrong? Maybe he really didn't like me and didn't even want to be seen with me. But I was going to do whatever he said, so five minutes later, I walked into the diner and found Ivan sitting at the counter.

We spoke a different language called "Carney," which originated in the carnivals where professional wrestling started back in the late 1700s in the U.S. So, as I walk into the restaurant, Ivan tells me in Carney to sit down. You know, when guys sit at a counter, it's common practice to leave an empty stool between between you, so that's what I did. But then Ivan says in Carney to get away from him. "Ah, man," I thought to myself. "This guy must really hate me!" Now I know why they called him Ivan the Terrible. So I moved five or six seats down.

Ivan had already ordered the best meal in the house—a steak, salad, and everything that came with it—and the waiter came up to me and asked what I'd have. Well, I didn't have much money, and to be honest with you, I was a little shaken up. So I said quietly, "I'll just have a Coke, please." At this point Ivan turned to me and bellowed loud enough for the entire place to hear, "What's wrong, kid, aren't you hungry?" He then told the waiter to give me the same thing he was having. Now remember, up until this point there had been dead silence between us. I thought this guy hated me. He wouldn't let me come into the restaurant with him. He wouldn't even let me sit near him, and now he was ordering dinner for me? He even started talking to me. So now I thought, maybe he did like me, and I became a little bit more relaxed by the time my food came.

Then all of a sudden Ivan told me to order lemon pie. Okay, fine by me. So when the waiter came by, Ivan ordered a piece of pie and I said that I'd like one, too. But as soon as the words came out of my mouth, Ivan started going crazy. He started yelling at me, telling me he had fought in the war and didn't want some punk kid mocking him. I had no idea what was going on, but Ivan's face was turning all red, and then he grabbed his chest and white foam started coming out of his mouth. Holy shit! This guy was having a heart attack or something.

With foam oozing out of his mouth, he told me in Carney to come over to him, and when I did, he told me to get him the fuck out of there. But instead of listening to him, I panicked and I started yelling for the waiter to call for an ambulance. Ivan now pulled me close and called me a stupid shit and ordered me to take him to the car. I wasn't about to argue with this guy, so I said: "Fine, I'll take you to the car."

Now, you have to understand, this guy was about 285 pounds, and I was at least a hundred pounds lighter. How the hell was I going to carry him to the car? But somehow I managed to do it. I dragged him along, and the next thing I knew, I was in front of the diner, trying to stuff him into the passenger-side seat of the Cadillac. I was so worried that he was going to die on me that I couldn't do anything right. I finally got Ivan in the car—at least I thought I did—but when I tried to close the car door, I slammed it on his ankle. Now Ivan got even more pissed and he started screaming for me to get into the car and drive. So I jumped into the driver's seat and started driving, even though I didn't have a license and I had no idea where the hell I was going. As I drove, Ivan remained slumped over in his seat, holding on to his mangled ankle while cursing the shit out of me. And then suddenly, from out of nowhere, he stopped, rose up like The Undertaker, and looked in the visor mirror, wiping the foam from his face and calmly pulled the remainder of an Alka-Seltzer tablet from his mouth. There was nothing wrong with him! This was just how he got a free meal. Then he went into the glove compartment and, as calm as can be, marked on his map where we had just been so he would know to avoid the place the next time he was in town. A little farther down the road, Ivan told me, "Hell, kid. What do you think you're doing? Pull over! You ain't got no license. That's illegal. What are you trying to do, get us arrested?"

That was when I really knew I had found my calling. An "epiphany" I believe they call it. Ivan's antics aside, I suddenly knew that after all the years of being a misfit, I had finally found my "home" in wrestling. I had never felt so sure about anything in my entire life. Little did I, or anyone else for that matter, know at the time that I was about to embark on a successful career during which I would make millions of dollars.

Most folks only have one dad; I now had one hundred, all cool in their own way. These gentlemen taught me to defend myself. Obviously physically, but twice as hard and more important, mentally. They not only trained me in all matters of life, they are also responsible for the birth and direction of the beast within me. They taught me that the wrestler, like the mouse, is a survivor. He must be able to fend for himself and also be aware at all times of his natural enemy—in the wrestler's case, it's the P.

One sad day in St. Louis I witnessed just how much power the snakelike P has. Stereotypically, a P is about five feet six inches, a 210-pound organism with a potbelly, wearing the same suit he's worn for the last twenty years, who smokes cheap cigars (that he had probably mooched) and sports a rug that looks like poodle roadkill. The P stands for "Promoter"—the sleazy men who used to run territorial wrestling promotions worldwide.

On this day, the promoter walked up to one of my fathers and said, "You stupid, fucking nigger!" and then continued to rip into him. I don't know if they knew I was there, but I just stepped back outside into the hallway waiting for him to pummel the P like he did his opponents in the ring. As far as I was concerned, he was a dead motherfucker. You have to understand, here was this pint-sized white guy yelling at a 320-pound black guy who could beat him to a pulp in an instant. But instead of pounding the P, my father did nothing. He just sat back and took it. To this day, I'll never forget watching in horror as one of my idols, a guy head and shoulders above other men, melted into the floor, taking all this crap from a promoter. I got very angry at my father, thinking, "Hit him! He just called you a fucking nigger!" I was almost in tears. My mind was racing. "Why are you being such a coward?" Then I became very sad. I realized that he took it because he just wanted to walk away with his day's pay.

I didn't comprehend it at the time, but that was pretty damn honorable, man. Forget about dignity—his family had to eat. He did what he had to do to put a meal on the table, and I respect that. What I saw in St. Louis that day gave me a foundation that will stay with me forever. Part one of this foundation is a love for my brothers, who put their families above all else, including personal pride. And part two is lifelong hatred for promoters and the common housefly.

2

The Los Angeles Years

EVERY person in this world is born with distinct talents and a unique personality, but our true identities don't blossom until we meet certain people or live in certain surroundings. For me, this area was Los Angeles. I remember the first time I set foot in this town of make-believe. I was nineteen and looking to make a name for myself in the sport of wrestling. Red Bastien, who was the booker in Dallas, where I had been wrestling for the last six weeks, suggested that I head to California. He had talked with a good friend of his, Leo Garibaldi, who was looking for young talent. So in 1973, I packed my bags in my Vega, which took me all of fifteen minutes, and I was off to California.

At this stage in my life, every time I entered a new territory, I would roll down my car window and warn the state and its citizens that I was coming to town. In L.A., my yell went something like this: "Look out, California. Roddy Piper is coming to town and I'm gonna kick your fucking ass!"

While the scream never worked in any other place, somehow

L.A. was different. Los Angeles was the site of the very first big break for Roddy Piper. I made a name for myself at the Olympic Auditorium—the same place where some of the wrestling greats from the past, like Gorgeous George and countless others, used to wrestle. As a matter of fact, their pictures hung on a wall inside the auditorium, and I remember telling Leo that I would love to one day get my picture up on that wall, too. Without thinking anything of it, Leo told me to give him a picture and he would get it put up there. I told him no. I didn't deserve to be in that company.

Not yet anyway!

The first thing I did when I got to L.A. was head over to the arena to find Garibaldi. He looked me up and down and said, "Who the hell are you?" I told him that I was Roddy Piper. "Who?" Roddy Piper, Red Bastien sent me. And he said, "Oh yeah. The locker room is down there."

Once I found Garibaldi, the next thing I had to do was find a place to stay. I asked the other wrestlers where the guys usually stayed, and they told me about a place on Ocean Avenue named the Flamingo Hotel. You couldn't rely on the bookers to do anything for you. There were no frills, they didn't pay for anything. If you got there you got there, if you didn't you didn't. So I booked myself into the hotel the guys recommended. Actually, it's the same hotel used in the movie *White Men Can't Jump*, starring Woody Harrelson and Wesley Snipes. How I managed to survive in this joint for two and a half years is beyond me, as there was a murder in our back alley about once a week. The owners of the place must have known that I was going to be "rowdy" while I stayed there, they gave me the room closest to the alley where all the murders were taking place.

Garibaldi was the booker and Mike LeBell was the promoter for the territory. Mike's half brother, Judo Gene LeBell, one of the toughest guys in the world, took a liking to me—thank God! I'd go down to his dojo to train, and eventually I earned a black belt. Gene gave me, Chuck Norris, and Bruce Lee black belts, and I don't think many more. Gene became like another father to me. I have the greatest respect for him. He trained me physically while Leo trained me psychologically. These two men are responsible for helping me make it in the sport of professional wrestling.

But before I get into my wrestling career in L.A., I would like to just give you a taste of the craziness that went on every day while I was living in California.

This was the time when Joe Gold, the founder of the famous Gold's Gyms, sold his facility in downtown Santa Monica with the understanding that he wouldn't open up another Gold's Gym close by. So what did Joe do? He went down about ten blocks and opened up another gym, calling it World's Gym. Once he opened his new gym, he got back all his old clients—Ken Wahler, Frank Zane, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Lou Ferrigno, and all the wrestlers. I, of course, followed the pack, as did my pal Jay "The Alaskan" York.

Jay and I became tight in L.A., wrestling together, training together, partying together, and getting into trouble together. I remember one time I got into a mess of trouble because of Jay—of course he also saved my ass. See, there was this popular Renaissance fair every year in Los Angeles, and Jay had this booth. It was quite a gimmick. He had this big cross where you could tie up your mate and whip him or her with a cat-o'-nine-tails that was made out of paper. He would attract customers by saying, "Me lords and me ladies, come and give them the punishment they deserve." People would come and pay a dollar or fifty cents, or whatever it was, and then Jay would gently bind them to the rack and let their mates have some fun in the sun. It was a big joke, and everyone seemed to enjoy the attraction and left the booth laughing.

One day I was hanging out at the fair with Jay and this gal comes up to the booth wearing a long black cape with a hood. She was holding on to another girl, and her husband was standing by her side. The girl turned to Jay and me and asked politely if she could put her husband on the rack. Jay, thinking nothing of it, agreed and proceeded to tie him up. Jay went to give her the paper cat-o'-nine-tails, but she informed him it wasn't necessary, because she'd brought her own. She then whipped out a stick from under her cape and started to beat the shit out of her husband. She was just wailing away on him, until Jay jumped in to stop her, telling her that she can't do this because it's a family place. But Jay, being the old-school type of wrestler and businessman that he was, made her an offer on the sly so that he wouldn't miss out on a payday. Jay asked the lady if she wanted to rent the rack when the fair closed down at 7 P.M. Without hesitation she agreed, and they set up a place and time to meet later that evening. After the deal was cut, Jay told the lady and her Gothic friends to get lost because they were killing his business.

After the fair ended, Jay asked me to take the rack over to the other side of the grounds to meet the couple. So, being the good friend I am, I took the contraption to the other side of the fair, but when I got there it wasn't just the couple waiting for me—there was a whole group of people. Thinking nothing of it—I'd seen weirder people come through the ropes on any given night—I set the rack up for them. Being the kind guy that I am I also showed them where to put their arms, using myself as an example. As I was demonstrating how to use the rack, a woman came up to me and tightened up the leather straps. Now there was nothing I could do to free myself, and the next thing I knew, they had a bonfire going and there were these rocks arranged in different formations and all kinds of weird shit, and they all started chanting. It was almost like something you would see on a movie set downtown. But this was no set or movie—it was very real!

Now I really began to panic. The woman started scratching her nail down the right side of my cheek, down to my throat, as though she were intimidating me with a butcher knife. Then these guys wearing black capes with hoods started walking over to me. They were actually in a circle, closing in on me, getting closer and closer with the chanting getting louder and louder. I now thought, "I'm gonna die."

Thankfully, before the ritual went any further, York came over with his twelve-foot bullwhip and started snapping the thing at the devil worshipers like Indiana Jones. That caused them to back off and allowed him to free me from the rack. To this day, I really don't know what they were going to do to me, but thank goodness Jay and his trusty whip showed up when they did. Jay freed me and I immediately started running for the hills. But not Jay. He went over to the devil worshipers and not only took his cross back, but also had the balls enough to ask the satanic couple who rented the prop for the money they owed him. No one, not even the devil, was going to stop Jay from earning a payday.

I always found myself getting into trouble when I was around Jay. We did a lot of partying together. One night Jay and I, along with his brother Ned, who, like everyone else in L.A., was working as an actor, were hanging out. We were at the Flamingo Hotel, where all the fun and dangerous games took place in the city. To show you how close I lived to danger every day, the Flamingo was located half a block from a place called Tommy's Famous Hamburgers, a place where a famous serial murderer, the Hillside Strangler, had claimed one of his victims. One of the saddest signs I've ever seen in my life hung on a telephone pole outside Tommy's. It said PLEASE HELP ME. It was posted there by the young girl's parents, and I'll never forget it because the words were painted in blood red on the sign right under her beautiful picture.

After getting high, the three of us went our separate ways. Jay went home to his house and Ned followed him out the door to his home in the Hollywood Hills. I had the shortest trip of all three of us. I just got up off my couch and went to my bedroom.

But when Ned got home, he didn't go right to bed. He just kept smoking and getting dusted all night. By the time the sun came up, he was completely out of it. For some reason, he went out into his backyard in his boxers, tank top, and sandals and started playing with a ball. He must have accidentally thrown it over the fence and into his neighbor's yard because when he reached over the fence to get the ball, the neighbor's dog took a hunk out of his hand. Now Ned started freaking out. He was bleeding all over the place; blood was dripping down his arm and got all over his tank top.

This was the day after the Hillside Strangler had killed a young woman whom Ned had recently worked with. Ned was pretty shaken up by the whole thing and had been talking about it all night to us while we were getting high. For some bizarre reason, Ned convinced himself that *he* was the Hillside Strangler, that he killed his friend and all these other women. He was really out of it, hysterical, and called the police to turn himself in. He told the cops where he lived, hung up the phone, walked out front, and sat on the curb with his wrapped, bleeding hand waiting to be taken into custody. When the police came, Ned started babbling about the latest victim, saying things that only somebody who knew the girl would know. At this point the officers were convinced that they had the murderer and it went out on the news wires.

By the time I got up, it was about five o'clock in the evening and I switched on the TV as I was getting ready to go to the arena to wrestle, and every station was reporting that the Hillside Strangler had been caught. To my surprise they were showing Ned York's picture. Then I saw a live shot of Jay entering the police station, wearing his wide-open Pendleton shirt—which revealed his hairy chest—tight jeans, lineman boots, a buck knife hanging by his side, and a twelve-foot bullwhip around his neck, going in to prove his brother's innocence. If you think I was surprised that evening, just think how Ned felt when he woke up in jail! He came out of his stupor and said, "What the hell am I doing in here?" Jay and Ned had a lot of explaining to do, and I'm not quite sure how they managed to convince the police that they had the wrong guy, but they finally did, and the cops let Ned off on some minor charge. This was the type of shit that was going on every day at this time in my life in L.A.

While I was in California, I crossed paths with greats from all walks of life. At one time or another, I hung out with one of the funniest comedians of our time, Andy Kaufman; got in the ring with "The Greatest" boxer ever, Muhammad Ali; had the pleasure of working with one of wrestling's true good guys, Lonnie Mayne; and also met up with the first black heavyweight wrestling champion, Tiger Nelson.

In the early stages of my career, I was taught not to socialize with the fans because it could hurt your career. You didn't want to get too close to them because if they could touch you and talk to you, why would they pay to come and see you or why would they watch you on TV?

But there was this one fan who would come to the back door of the Olympic Auditorium and would always manage to get into the matches for free. He was an impersonator, who did this great impersonation of Elvis, and this act always went over well with the cops, who would then let him in to see the show.

Once he got inside, he always managed to find me and kept telling me how hilarious I was, and he also loved to imitate me. After a while I got used to seeing him around, so I thought nothing of talking to him and I even would hang around with him after the matches. The comedian had a van, and I'd get into the van with him and he'd ask me to say something funny to him. So, thinking that he wanted to hear a joke, I'd say something like: "My first wife died of poison mushrooms, my second wife died of poison mushrooms, and my third wife died of a brain concussion." He then asked, "What happened?" and I answered, "She wouldn't eat the poison mushrooms."

Not amused by my joke, the comedian would just stare at me with a deadpan look on his face and say, "No, say something funny." Well, I asked him what he found funny and he told me that he thought I was funny in the ring. This is where we differed. I didn't find anything funny about what I did in the ring for a living each night.

I asked him what he thought was funny. He recalled one night in the Olympic Auditorium when I was on the microphone and I had just busted up two or three wrestlers. They were lying on the floor, I was bleeding, and the crowd was going wild, starting to riot. I just said, "Is there no justice?" and the comedian thought this was hilarious. The irony of me bleeding over a couple of wrestlers and saying is there no justice with a riot coming, well, that wasn't funny to me. But this guy thought it was; this guy who I am talking about was Andy Kaufman.

Andy would sometimes take me to a place called the Improv and he would get up on the stage and do my interviews as part of his act. After about ten minutes of doing this, the people would yell at him to get off the stage, telling him he wasn't funny. But he would still try to get over with the crowd with my material until he'd finally storm off the stage.

This was a different business, the comedy business. He was supposed to entertain these people by making them laugh, but all he was doing was pissing them off to the point where they all wanted their money back. I wasn't understanding what he was trying to do. He was a great comedian, who had so much great material—especially the skit he used to do with the bongo drums—why was he using my interview material to try and make his audience hate him?

Andy was quite a character. I remember Andy would have comedy concerts in this little arena in L.A., and after the show he would take everybody from the audience in a yellow school bus for chocolate mousse pie at one of his favorite restaurants in town. He was also working on a show called *The New Dick Van Dyke Show*, and one day Andy took me to meet the star of the show. So he said to Dick Van Dyke, "This is Roddy Piper," and Van Dyke said, "So this is the genius you've been talking about?" Apparently he'd told Dick Van Dyke all about me, about my wrestling at the Olympic Auditorium and my work on the mic. But I just hate compliments, I don't want to listen to them. I just retract, hide, go back into my little shell. I never understood why Andy was so fascinated by me. He was a master at his craft, but for some reason he was mesmerized by the world of professional wrestling.

Andy never smoked, drank, or did anything wrong that I knew of, as far as his health was concerned. I remember, just before I left L.A., I went to say good-bye to him. I told him I was moving on and his eyes actually welled up with tears. He said, "I'll make you proud of me, Roddy." That's the last time I ever saw Andy Kaufman.

Another great guy I had the pleasure of meeting in Los Angeles was a wrestler named Lonnie Mayne. He looked like Santa Claus and drove a Trans Am, and boy, was he a madman! Two of the things that I remember most about this guy were that he loved to drink Southern Comfort out of a Coke can and that he also loved to have fun with the guys.

Once he was driving to Bakersfield with his tag partner Ron Bass, and he bet Ron a "hit in the head with a frying pan" that they would see a deer in their travels. Ron agreed to the wager, sure that he would win the bet because there were no deer on the route they were driving. Well, the two get to Bakersfield, and just as Ron thought, they didn't spot any deer on their journey. When they got to the apartment they were sharing, Ron reminded Lonnie of their little bet and then proceeded to tap Mayne on the head with the frying pan.

At that time wrestling in Bakersfield was every Thursday, so the following week Lonnie wanted a chance to get even, so he made the same bet with Bass. Once again there were no deer on the drive, and Lonnie got bonked a second time. But one day Lonnie finally got even. Bass and he were again taking the drive from L.A. to Bakersfield and Lonnie spotted a deer on the side of the road as they were driving to their match. He was ecstatic, but said nothing until they got back to their apartment. Once they got inside, Lonnie picked up an iron frying pan and called Ron's name. Ron turned around and *pow!*—Lonnie knocked him out cold, and split open his head.

Lonnie was always fooling around. He would do things like set my shirt on fire when I was in front of the camera on live TV, but it was all in good fun. The next day he would buy me a new shirt that was twice as expensive as the one he ruined the night before. That's just the kind of guy he was. He liked to have fun and really was a great guy.

When I met him he was just about to wind up his wrestling career and go into the real estate business with his dad. But unfortunately he found out he had cirrhosis of the liver and was about to die.

He never did get to go into business with his father, and it had nothing to do with his liver disorder either. One night, after a match in San Bernardino, I saw Lonnie holding on to the side of his car and puking. I asked him if he was all right and he told me not to worry, that he was fine, so I went home. The next morning I got a call from Lonnie's wife, telling me that he hadn't come home the night before, and immediately I started to cover up for him, thinking maybe he was jerking around.

Thinking quick, I told his wife that maybe he'd gone to San Francisco a day early. But the following day I got another call from Lonnie's wife, and she still hadn't heard from him. I soon learned the truth behind Lonnie's disappearance. He left San Bernardino in his Trans Am the night I saw him after our match. I was told that he was driving on the freeway in the far right lane, and his car drifted over the other three lanes, went over the grass median and into oncoming traffic, and hit a woman and her child head-on.

The impact of the crash was so bad that it not only killed everybody instantly, it also left Lonnie's body unidentifiable. As a matter of fact, the only way the police were able to identify the body was through his wrestling license, which he had on him. When the news came out that Lonnie had died, immediately everybody was saying that it was a suicide, but I don't believe that. Lonnie Mayne was consumed with what I call "the Sickness," which you'll learn more about in chapter 12. He was too good a man to ever take anyone else's life if he was going to take his own.

Wrestling in Los Angeles also allowed me to meet superstars in other sports. It was through wrestling that I was able meet "The Greatest" boxer of all time.

Muhammad Ali was scheduled to fight Antonio Inoki in Japan on June 25, 1976. The Japanese fans loved watching their top fighters take on American athletes. Mike LeBell had an in with Japan and I started going to the Orient to wrestle as Stan Hansen's first tag-team partner. The Japanese promoters loved having Americans come to their country to wrestle because the matches always drew huge crowds and made them lots of money. The people loved wrestling, but their version of the sport was somewhat different from ours. If there was some spectacular move or pin, the people would all just clap. They were so polite. Quite a difference from the matches and the audiences I was used to back in the States.

Ali's match against Japanese wrestler Antonio Inoki took place in Tokyo. Judo Gene LeBell was the referee in this fight and I was on this card via satellite from Los Angeles. Antonio Inoki lay on his back for almost all of the fifteen rounds, and he just kept kicking Ali's legs. You could see the black-and-blue marks appearing on his legs during the match. People couldn't understand what was going on.

When Ali was training for this fight, he held a press conference in the Olympic Auditorium. At the time I was the Light Heavyweight Champion of the World (the only world title I have ever held and the only one I ever wanted to hold; all the rest of them are just heavy and they beep when you go through the metal detectors at the airport). At the press conference, a karate champion tried to leg-dive Ali while his entourage and camera crew watched his every move. Ali was able to hold his own against the jerk, who was trying to make the boxing champ look like a fool, while making a name for himself at the same time.

I was sitting in the front row taking all this in and Ali looked over and pointed to me. In typical Ali fashion, he started saying to me, "You. I want you. I want you in the ring." I had just wrestled in some matches where the loser had to shave his head—and I lost.

I must admit I have an ugly bean; there are a whole bunch of gashes where things have hit me over the years, so it was not pretty. So there I was, bald, wearing my green corduroy suit, and Ali's taunting me to come into the ring with him. I looked around to make sure he wasn't talking to anyone else, and when I realized that I was the only one sitting there, I said okay and went into the ring.

On my way, Judo Gene LeBell was looking at me like "what the hell are you doing?" and I just shrugged my shoulders as if to say, "I don't know, Gene." Muhammad Ali then locked up with me wrestler style, and nobody believes me to this day, but I heard Ali say, "Hip-toss me." I wasn't about to argue with the champ, so I hip-tossed him. Over he went, his shoe fell off, and all of a sudden all of these Muslims with bulges in their jackets started charging into the ring. Knowing that these guys weren't coming into the ring to shake my hand, I hightailed out of there as fast as I could. But I think the reason Ali called me onto the mat that day was because he was such a great man that he was just looking to give a young kid like me a break and some exposure. He was that kind of an athlete, one who was so secure about who he was that he could afford to be that kind.

I also had the pleasure of meeting another sports legend, although I didn't know it at the time.

When you enter the Olympic Auditorium you come into a hallway that has a huge heavy steel door. It's like you're entering a dungeon. You have to go down these steep stairs. The paint on the wall is peeling and there are these huge pipes overhead that drip with condensation. As you walk down this cement hallway, you can either go to the right or the left, but whichever way you go, there are just these holes in the wall with concrete and benches. Welcome to the Olympic Auditorium locker room. It was always musty down there, and when you picked your cubicle of death and dumped your gear on the bench, the rats would scurry away.

Despite the shitty locker rooms, there was still an allure to wrestling in the Olympic Auditorium. Many greats from the past had graced the halls of this historic landmark. I was to find out by chance that a great from the past was still among us.

When you first entered the locker rooms there was a big massage table, and there was also a black gentleman named Tiger Nelson. Tiger was about 108 years old. He would say hello to everyone who came by and call them "horsecock." He used to wash our backs in the shower after the matches. He was quite a tall man, but all crippled and hunched over. He wore slippers and big baggy pants with an untucked blue shirt, like a gas-station attendant. Tiger was hip, though; he was a rapper before rapping was cool. He was a fine and honorable man. He would hear the showers go on, and then you'd hear him shuffling in his slippers to go get his washcloth and bar of soap, which resembled the kind you'd get from any Days Inn, and he'd be ready so he could scrub your back.

No matter who you were he would always say, "Oh horsecock, you could've heard that heat in Tokyo." He was talking about what a great-quality match you had. The truth of the matter was that he hadn't seen a match for thirty-five years. Tiger stayed in the locker rooms during the matches. Wrestlers would usually tip him a little something. I took a liking to this old man and I'd usually give him thirty or forty bucks or whatever I could. He used to call me "Misser Piper, sir."

I started talking to Tiger on a weekly basis, and he would tell me about the heat he heard in Tokyo, scrub my back, and shuffle on out. One day I finally asked him why he called everybody horsecock. He laughed and said, "Well, sir, everybody likes to be called horsecock, and dat ways I don't have to remember anybody's name."

After a match one night, I was coming out of the arena and I ran into Tiger as he was counting his tips. I said good night and he asked me what time it was. When I told him it was 11:30, he grabbed his head and bent over, let out a groan, and said, "Oooh, I done missed my last bus, Misser Piper." I told Tiger not to worry, that I'd give him a lift home. He was hesitant. "Well, sir, not many white folk live where I do, sir," he said, but I told him that I didn't care. In hindsight, what he was really trying to tell me was, "I don't want some honky son of a bitch like you in my neighborhood." But I didn't get it, and kept insisting. He really didn't want the ride until I told him that I just got a brand-new Cadillac. He started laughing and said to me, "I ain't never had a ride in a Cadillac, sir." Out of pride he insisted that I take two bus transfers in exchange for the ride.

So I drove Tiger home that night into Watts in L.A., and he invited me in. His place was about fourteen feet long and about eight feet wide. It had one of those old hot plates made out of porcelain, a cot, a chair, a sink, and a tiny bathroom. He invited me to sit in his chair and asked, "Misser Piper, sir. Are youse a drinkin' man?" And I told him that I was and he asked me if I had ever tried the Ripple. I said, "Yes, Tiger, I've drunk a lot of Ripple," even though I had never touched the stuff until that night. So he reached under the carpet and pulled out a bottle of Ripple. He was a little embarrassed when he realized that I saw that he had the bottle stashed under the carpet, so to save face, he told me that he liked his Ripple warm, and I said, "Me, too, Tiger," as I took a swig out of the bottle.

I noticed a scrapbook on the table and I started looking through it. There was a picture of two guys. Both of them were wearing black ties and tails with a stovepipe hat, and I said to Tiger, "Gee, that guy looks like Bob Hope." And he responded, "That *is* Misser Hope, sir." I asked Tiger who that other man was, and he told me that it was him and that he used to own a nightclub at that time and that Bob Hope used to work for him. "I's used to wears me a top hat and them there tails and tuxedo, and when I wore that, people used to gives me respect." He also said that when Bob Hope came into the club he would take his cane, kick it around and bounce it off the floor, and Tiger would snatch the cane right away from him. Tiger said, "You know, that's why Misser Hope took up golf."

There was another picture in the album of a beautiful black lady. I asked him who that was and he said it was his Rosie. I asked him what happened to her, and was she still with us. He said, "No, they think that she may have just wandered into the wrong neighborhood." Then he remained silent, and I could see the sadness in his eyes.

I didn't know how to respond, so I just kept looking through the scrapbook. I came across another interesting photo in Tiger's book, a boxing match from an aerial view. I thought I recognized one of the guys in the photo, and I asked Tiger, "Is that Jack Johnson?"

"Yes, sir, Misser Piper. That's Misser Jack Johnson himself," he said.

"I'll be damned. Jack Johnson! Who is he fighting?"

Tiger said, "Why, Misser Piper, he's fighting me."

"Wait a second, Tiger, you fought Jack Johnson?"

He said, "Yes, sir, I did."

I excitedly said, "That's great. That must have been a great career move. That must have put you on top of the world."

"Misser Piper," he said, "I'll tell youse what happened. I was a young, bold stud, and I comes out that first round and there's Misser Johnson, and we's went toe-to-toe hittin' back and forth, and I went back to my corner after the first round. Ins the second round Misser Johnson comes out and he hit me wit a left hook and it done felt like a mule kicked me in the head, and I starts a wobblin' and alls of a sudden these big black arms came around me and Misser Johnson whispered in my ear, 'Just hold on, nigga, just hold on.' Misser Johnson jus' kept holdin' on to me for fifteen rounds fors the rest of that there fight."

I then said, "So, Tiger, that must have made you a contender."

He answered, "No, sir, Misser Piper. It done killed my career."

I asked him what he meant, and he told me that he couldn't ever get another fight. Tiger paused and took another swig of Ripple and then started coughing really bad and holding his side. When he settled down he continued his story, telling me that because he went fifteen rounds with Jack Johnson, nobody wanted him fighting against their boy. It killed his career. He lost his nightclub and he lost everything. He wasn't a businessman. He had been getting by on his reputation as an athlete.

Tiger started coughing really bad again, and he turned to me and said, "Misser Piper, sir, I's starting to get the aches again. Do you mine if I go lay down for a whiles. You'se welcome to stay." I thanked him and said that I was going to go. He asked me to turn the light out for him. As I was closing the door behind me, I heard him cough, and that was the last time I ever heard or saw Tiger Nelson alive. The next time I laid eyes upon Tiger was when he was being buried. He must have been in the service because the Legion buried him. There were four people there including myself. Tiger Nelson's real name was Theodore Roosevelt Reid.

This was a hard reality check for me. How could someone who was once at the top of his profession wind up scrubbing wrestlers' hairy backs for a living and end up dying alone? But I was determined not to let it get to me. I learned how to dismiss things like this from my mind and to block things out, and I had a lot of practice at this over the course of my life. The Sickness of my sport was well embedded in me. It was consuming me. I was living, breathing, and eating what I was doing.

The territory had been pretty much running at rock bottom, not having drawn a lot of people for quite some time. In order to better my performance on the canvas, I used to go to Melnick Hall at UCLA where they had wrestling tapes from 1956 to 1960 that I watched during the day. These tapes showcased the talents of Dick Lane, Gorgeous George, and other famous grapplers from L.A's past. I would watch the reels over and over again, stopping the action and replaying it when I saw something that I wanted to learn.

But I was doing just fine on my own in spite of what Leo had been thinking when he first laid eyes on me. He must have been saying to himself: "This kid is too young. There's nothing I can do with this guy. Nobody likes the bagpipes and stuff like that. And on top of all that, he wears a skirt to the ring!" But he took a chance on my nineteen-year-old skinny ass anyway, and it wound up working out for both of us. I would change the face of wrestling before anybody on the West Coast realized what hit them.

Leo booked me against a wrestler named Java Ruuk, whose real name was Johnny Rodz. Just before the match against this mean-looking wrestler, who'd grown up on the tough streets of New York, Garibaldi seemed to be having second thoughts about having me face him. Leo knew Ruuk was very vicious and unorthodox between the ropes; he would just get in the ring and scratch and claw at you until you couldn't take it anymore.

But instead of taking me off the card, Leo came up with what *he* thought was a great plan. He said to me, "Come here, kid. I'm gonna give you a break. This is what I want you to do. I want you to go in there with this Java Ruuk and basically don't touch the guy. I don't want no offense from you. I don't want you to wrestle him, I want you to let him beat you and beat you down and then pin you one, two, three." Then he walked away.

Now I'm thinking to myself: "Break? Some plan. Then what?" But what I failed to realize at this time was that I was in Hollywood, where everything—and everyone—is make-believe. If you wanted to have any success in Hollywood, you had to be able to act no matter what your job was. It wasn't like IBM was calling to make me an executive or that that job as a brain surgeon had finally opened up; it was this or sweep the streets. Java Ruuk then proceeded to beat me to death in the ring and the crowd loved every last minute of it. Me, I was thinking this was dumb, and I was humiliated after I lost because I couldn't fight back, but in retrospect, I have to say that Leo Garibaldi was a total genius in the sport of professional wrestling.

Before the next week's match, Leo had this T-shirt made up for me that said: I'D RATHER SWITCH THAN FIGHT. Leo got the idea for the saying from a popular TV commercial for cigarettes. It was the one with the guy with the black eye who said, "I'd rather fight than switch." Well, Leo, being the genius he was, made me wear the shirt into the ring the next time I had a match with Ruuk. Instead of getting the stuffing beat out of me again, Leo had me on the microphone doing interviews as Java's manager and new tag partner, explaining to the crowd that "I'd rather switch than fight." I told them that it had nothing to do with Java kicking the crap out of me the week before, but rather that I wanted to be the Arab wrestler's spokesperson because I cared so much and I'm such a nice guy!

This got a tremendous amount of heat with the mostly Mexican audience, as there was a large Hispanic population in Los Angeles and most of them had come to see the wrestler kick my ass again and not for me to make an about-face and become his manager and new tag partner. This little incident marked the beginning of a new phase in my wrestling career. I was learning how to become a master on the mike.

Well, at first I didn't want to talk about myself, so I decided I would talk about Java. This was just laid upon me and I didn't know what to expect, but like FDR once said, "Some people just have greatness thrust upon them." So I looked over at Java Ruuk with that ugly rug on his head, and the words just started flowing naturally.

All of a sudden I had found a platform where I could become a man and make my mark, instead of having to take the backseat and let things happen to me. I was now front and center, and I liked the feeling of power. I had three cameras on me and six thousand people listening—a lot different from standing on a street corner playing my bagpipes and people just walking right past me. Now I had all of this attention. What was I supposed to do? I just got real comfortable, real quick on the mike, and everyone in attendance was listening and believing what I was saying. They forgot all about the beating that Java once gave me, and with all the anger spewing through the mike, I made these people believe that I was proud and not a coward.

Up until this time I had probably done only two or three interviews. But I felt I had a bit of a knack for telling people what was going on. I had nineteen years of venom building up in my belly, and as I started doing these interviews, the edge in me started to come out. There was no preparation here. It was live TV, so it was all ad-lib. I was just put in front of the camera at the Olympic Auditorium, and they would say, "Okay, you've got three minutes. Tell us about yourself, and talk about Java Ruuk."

Here I was, a Canadian kid in Los Angeles in 1974, standing there with a kilt on and bagpipes in my hand, in front of six thousand Hispanics, next to a Puerto Rican acting like an Egyptian madman wearing a towel from the Motel 6 on his head, and they all wanted *me* to do something. So without hesitation, I blew up my bagpipes for them. Now, being a former bagpipe champion, I knew I could play them well, but the audience had no idea what to expect. At that moment all I could think of was Jack Benny and his violin and how bad he had played that instrument over the years. I realized how good he had to have really been in order to play that bad! The bagpipes, like the violin, are a beautiful instrument, but when they are up in your face, they tend to be pretty annoying, especially when you've got a good bagpipe player trying to play really bad!

Jimmy Lennon was the ring announcer that night. He was a fine man and probably the most famous ring announcer in boxing at that time. He also saved my life, later in my career, when he refused to get out of the way as a crazy gunman with a .45 automatic tried to take a shot at me right as I was about to enter the ring. After security subdued the lunatic, and after my match, they emptied the guy's gun, and there was a bullet with my name on it. If it hadn't been for Jimmy Lennon standing in this guy's way, I don't know what would have happened.

But getting back to my story about that night with Java Ruuk . . . I asked Jimmy Lennon to ask the crowd to stand for the Scottish national anthem and he did his best to comply. But they certainly hadn't paid good money to watch me play the pipes. These people wanted action, but I wasn't going to let them have their way until I had mine. Even though all six thousand people were booing me, wanting me to put the pipes down and wrestle, I acted like I didn't care. Even Ruuk was going back and forth in the ring like a crazy man, wanting to tussle, but I still wanted to play my bagpipes. It took about two or three minutes and finally the crowd shut up and let me play. I started playing "Isle of Skye" while Lennon held the microphone down by what's called the chanter, which is the part of the bagpipes where the fingering is done, and now the music came blaring over the PA system.

The booing ceased as people must have thought, "Hey, that's sort of a nice tune." But they were in for a big surprise when I started holding and dragging out the B, C, and E notes, sending annoying sounds throughout the Olympic Auditorium. These people now started coming unglued, and they started booing and throwing cups and lit cigarette butts in the ring at me.

That night marked the beginning of my new art—the art of ring psychology. I would play these annoying notes on the bagpipes and the people would boo, but they loved every second of it. I was amazed that I could control the masses. As the people would come to the crescendo of their booing, I would start to play the bagpipes really well, playing a jig like "The Irish Washerwoman." As soon as I noticed the people clapping and starting to get into it, I would play that annoying C note again. It was like torture. It was fucking annoying. They just wanted me out of there. All this emotion, and the match hadn't even begun! So by the time the bell rang, these people were ready to kill me, and the scary part of it all was that most of them probably could have, because remember, I was still a scrawny teenager at the time.

Well, after I got this heated crowd reaction the first time, Garibaldi started putting me out there as much as possible. He had me wrestle on the first match, then I'd referee the next bout, then I'd manage someone later on, and would finally wrestle in the last match. This went on for about six months, at a seven-nights-per-week clip. Well, it didn't take long for the word on me to start getting out, and soon I was meeting quite a cast of characters.

One of the characters I met at this time was none other than actor Henry Winkler. I was working out at the dojo with LeBell, and there was this movie they were shooting at the Olympic Auditorium with Winkler called *The One and Only*. Winkler was playing the part of an actor who became a wrestler because he was out of work, and LeBell got me a small part in the film.

Right before the scene with Winkler, LeBell grabs me like we were going to fight and slaps me hard three or four times in the face, and says to Henry, "You see this kid, you can't hit him too hard." Well, when it came time for "The Fonz" to hit me, he blasted me with this German helmet, knocking me a little too close to the camera. I then heard the director say, "I got me another Robert Redford here. Look at that. He's already cheating on his close-ups!"

After this experience, the director talked to me and wondered if I was interested in having an acting career. I said no, but in spite of this I was still sent a Screen Actors Guild card in the mail, even though I never asked for it or wanted any part of it! I was in the limelight of wrestling for the first time and I had found a home and a family. I wasn't about to let go of my family to be in the movies. Finally, I had something solid, and a place that would accept me for what and who I was. Little did I know that the director who'd asked me about acting had been Carl Reiner, and I turned him down—another brilliant career move!

Garibaldi started boasting that I was "going places that no other man has gone before." Well, Mike LeBell proved that to be true. Mike was a promoter who always came up with these ideas that didn't apply to wrestling. Some were good and some were bad, but this next one was an interesting one, though I found it to be humiliating.

Mike came up with a routine where I would hypnotize people. So, one night, I get to the arena and LeBell hands me this plastic gold watch on a plastic gold chain and I'm on TV hypnotizing Keith

Frankie, who later became known as Adrian Adonis. I'm telling him, "You're going to lose the match. You're going to lose the match," as I'm swinging the fake gold watch in front of his face. Now, you have to imagine the amount of embarrassment I was feeling at this time. Here I was, a kid among giants like Lonnie Mayne, Andre the Giant, and Harley Race, and I'm out there supposedly hypnotizing another wrestler. There was no sports-entertainment back then. They were all just laughing at me off camera and I felt humiliated.

Next thing I know, LeBell and Garibaldi are getting phone calls from the people in town who wanted to have me hypnotize them so that they could try to forget their troubles. Not wanting to pass on an opportunity to "help the public" (and draw a big crowd), Leo and Mike had me start coming to the arena at five o'clock—three hours before matches began—just so I could work "my magic." They had me set up in the balcony at the Olympic Auditorium with a lopsided table and the cheesiest red candle I had ever seen in my life. The line of people who were already there when I got to the arena was amazing. These people actually thought I could do this and were showing up by the boatload. People would come to me with all sorts of problems, and in no time I found myself saying things like: "You will get a hard-on; you will make love with your wife; you will find your dog . . ." Crazy stuff like that.

So now I go along with it for a while thinking it's fun and part of my job. This went on for about two months, and there were sometimes 200 to 250 people waiting for me to put them under my spell. I just couldn't believe these people actually thought I could do this.

But it all came to an end one day when reality checked in. Among the seventy-five or so people on line waiting to see me was this Mexican gentleman who was about forty years old. I asked him what his problem was. Basically, I was being an insensitive shit. He started talking to me about his family in front of all these other people. He starts crying and telling me about his wife who has cancer and his terrible problems with his kids. I'm thinking, "Wait a second, why am I doing this?" It was the first time I realized how much power one holds in one's hands simply by being featured in the media. That's the first time in my life that I applied morality to professional wrestling. I realized that I couldn't do this to these people. There would be no more hypnotizing coming from me. It was the first time I was drawing the line in a sport that's lineless. At the risk of losing my job, I told Leo and Mike that I was through deceiving these people and that the routine would not go any further.

Garibaldi argued with me, but I kept insisting that I couldn't do this anymore. After a while he understood my point and the next week I stopped doing the hypnotizing thing. This was the first time also that I started developing the "wrestling morals" and vowed I would not cheat the wrestling fan like that and jerk their feelings around ever again.

But now I had the added burden placed on me to come up with a promo for my next fight, which was against the very popular Chavo Guerrero. So the next week I showed up on TV sitting on a donkey, which was painted like a zebra, just like they do in Tijuana. I was wearing a sombrero and I had a carrot on the end of a stick, which was dangling in front of the donkey. Of course I was wearing my kilt and saying terrible things about Guerrero, while wearing an antagonizing T-shirt that said CONQUEROR OF THE GUERREROS. I started talking about "wetbacks" and how they were so uneducated and stuff like that.

The television station called Mike LeBell because they got so many complaints about my behavior. They were worried about the ratings, so the next week I had to go on TV and apologize to the Hispanic population. I said I didn't mean any disrespect and I would learn the Mexican national anthem on my bagpipes and play it in honor of their wonderful people. A few weeks went by and I started bragging about how good the anthem sounded on the bagpipes and that I'd soon be ready to play it. So now comes the Wednesday before the Friday-night main event, and I went on TV and said, "I've got it, I've learned the Mexican national anthem on the *gaita*"—

Spanish for "bagpipes." By this time these people believed that I had some sincerity in me, and couldn't wait to hear this new rendition of their country's song.

Well, don't ever let me fool you.

That Friday's house show was sold out and I was the single main event, so it was the first Olympic sold-out show that I was responsible for. In those days you and your opponent were directly accountable for drawing people to the matches, unlike today, when the federations tow the line. This was also the night when I was supposed to belt out my rendition of the Mexican national anthem before belting my opponent in the ring. The event was going to be on Channel 34, which would be broadcast across the nation in Spanish. Chavo wanted no part of my antics. He came from a big, well-known wrestling family (and I think I tackled every one of them except Mama Guerrero during my career) and he was more interested in taking part in the match than in the hype.

When I entered the ring that evening, I asked Jimmy Lennon to ask the crowd to please stand, as I was going to play the Mexican anthem on my bagpipes. The entire crowd stood up—mothers holding their babies, fathers standing at attention with their kids, some with their hands over their hearts and others with their caps off and their heads bowed, waiting to pay homage to their beloved Mexico. Lennon then placed the microphone down by my chanter, and I looked around in awe, knowing that the entire crowd and TV audience was now waiting on me. I blew up the bagpipes and I started playing, only it wasn't the Mexican national anthem . . . it was "La Cucaracha"!

Well, it's safe to say that the night was pretty much over. Up came the chairs, up came the knives . . . the entire place came unglued in a matter of seconds. L.A.'s finest, who were near the ring, now had a full-fledged riot on their hands. They whipped out their nightsticks, but even those didn't deter all these angry people from rushing the ring. I had to learn the art of punting people pretty quick. Pele couldn't have done as much punting as I did that night.

I would let them come up onto the ring apron because you've got to duck between the second and third rope in order to get in, and—boom!—I'd land a swift, quick kick to their chops and send them flying onto the auditorium floor. I learned to be pretty good at keeping the ring clear. Unfortunately, I didn't make it out without getting a few bumps and bruises myself, and I was also stabbed on this night. After Mike LeBell found out I was stabbed, he said, "Well, this is why they pay so much for those seats." Ah, the price of fame . . .

Even though it doesn't sound like it, this night went in my favor. The word started getting around about this guy who was selling out the West Coast, a territory that had been virtually dead. And the next thing I knew, I was flying to San Antonio, courtesy of the Hispanic TV station, to wrestle this young up-and-comer, Tully Blanchard, in his first pro match. He was the son of the area's promoter, Joe Blanchard. I'll never forget the feeling of walking into that arena with all these people knowing who I was. Up until this time I had never had this type of recognition. I drew quite a crowd that night in San Antonio.

I remember there used to be a policeman there named Rosie, whose job was to keep the crowd and the wrestlers under control. He carried a double-sided blackjack. On one side was sawdust, and on the other end was the real blackjack. Many times the promoter would send Rosie into the ring and he would hit the wrestler with the soft side of the blackjack to get control of him. Anytime a fan or somebody undesirable came unglued, Rosie would just switch that blackjack around and whack them until they were back under control.

After my match with Blanchard, I went back to the dressing room, and Terry Funk, the World Champion at the time, who had just completed his match, also came back. Just as I was getting out of the shower, a Hispanic fellow who was about six-foot-four and 270 pounds came backstage looking for some trouble. I remember Terry just charging this guy; he had his world-title belt in his hand

and just nailed this thug right in the face. Seconds later Rosie was on the scene with the blackjack. Rosie pulled the guy's pants down and hog-tied him with his own belt so he couldn't move, cuffed him, and kicked the shit out of him.

This began the violent era of my life, when violence became okay. I had already been stabbed once, and now my wrestling family and I, on one hand, and the wrestling fans, on the other, became two different worlds. At this time in my life I was a loose cannon. Challenge me about wrestling being fake and you wouldn't even have time to get the words out of your mouth. I would already be across the table with my hands around your throat. That's just what you did when someone questioned the morals of your livelihood. I was now in the dojo every day with Judo Gene LeBell, learning how to break bones. Gene LeBell is one of the toughest men I know, and now he was teaching me the ropes and how to hold my own against anyone. I was fighting by day and wrestling by night.

But all the training in the world couldn't have prepared me for one memorable match in Fresno. Whenever I tell this story people think I'm being funny, but to be honest with you, I didn't think it was funny then and I still don't find it funny now.

Roy Scheiers, a promoter on the San Francisco circuit, approached me about wrestling a bear. I can remember thinking to myself on the drive up to Fresno that I had never heard of this guy called "The Bear," but I took the booking anyway.

Well, the night arrives and I'm fashionably late as usual because I'm the star. (Well, in reality I'm not a star; there is no such thing. The only reason they call you a star is so they can butter you up and pay you less money; that's why you always avoid promoters.) When I finally get to the arena in Fresno, I walk in the locker room and there it was . . . standing on its hind legs, this huge, hairy creature with a bottle of Wild Turkey between its paws, and it's just guzzling that whiskey. The monster finishes the pint, smashes the bottle on the floor, and then the trainer gives him a Coke and he dumps that into his mouth in one shot, too, and lets the bottle go crashing to the floor. This is the first thing I see when I enter the dressing room . . . a fucking drunk bear! In the car over to the match, I'm thinking I'm wrestling Bear Man, but now I'm face-to-face with this real live Kodiak bear!

I'm informed that the bear's name is Victor—like I need to know its name; there were fifteen wrestlers in the dressing room and one bear and I need to know its name so I can identify him?—and that he weighs about 650 pounds. The trainer came over to me and explained the rules of wrestling a bear. He told me that you don't want to hit the bear, because he's got those huge paws and he'll swat you in the head and break your neck before you know what hit you. The good man also informed me that the bear's claws had been taken out and his front teeth were missing, but then he told me not to get my finger near the back of his mouth because he'd bite it off. Then the trainer told me how to lock up with the bear. He said that I've got to get up close to the beast, and once I'm close, the trainer will jab him in the ass with this stick. This will make the bear stand on its hind legs, and now it's my job to get up underneath him and get his paws on my shoulders and my hands on his shoulders. See, bears don't like to stand, so I have to move quick in order to keep him up on his hind legs.

So I'm considering my options. Here I have a drunk bear named Victor who weighs more than three times my weight and wants to either bite off all my fingers or break my neck when I get in the ring with him. Just as I'm about to make my decision about whether or not to go through with this, my good friend Jay comes up to me and slaps me in the ass like a football player does and, while laughing, tells me to "Go get 'em kid!" I figure he's laughing because he knows how nervous I am to go wrestle this bear.

So I'm in the ring, the bell rings, and the trainer jabs the drunk bear in the ass with the stick and I get up and I lock up under the bear. To win a wrestling match, you've got to pin the guy's shoulders to the mat for a three-count. When you lock up with a bear, you realize that a bear don't got no shoulders, so how the hell are you gonna beat him? Bears are natural wrestlers. They know how to arm-drag you and go behind you. This is exactly what the bear did to me. The next thing I know I'm down on the mat with about eight inches of bear snout up my ass, and for the life of me I can't figure out why. The people are laughing hysterically, but I fail to see the humor in this situation. All those rules that the trainer told me went right out the window. I clawed, beat, scratched, bit, and everything I could think of to do, and still I had bear up my ass. The people are now laughing so hard they're crying and little do they know that this bear is killing me. I'm getting mauled here and I really think I'm gonna die. I give the high sign to the trainer and yell, "Get this motherfucker off of me!" I was fighting for my life here.

Well, before I go any further, let me tell you why the bear loved my bum so much. It all goes back to the slap on the ass from my "good friend" Jay. He was not showing support, he was actually putting a handful of honey on my tights, giving the bear reason to go after my sweet ass. The bear smelled the honey and he was having a feast on the sticky smorgasbord on my ass. He even got under my trunks and pulled them down. But when he ran out of honey, he wasn't too happy. All that bear wanted to do was kill me.

The trainer finally ended up tranquilizing the beast, but it took a while for the drug to kick in. It takes about two minutes, which feels like two days, and in the meantime the bear continued to kick the shit out of me. I did everything I could to slow him down, but he just kept coming. Every time I turned around I was getting slapped back by the bear. Thankfully, the tranquilizer took effect and the bear passed out. I didn't care that my trunks were down around my ankles, I was just glad to get out of there alive. But the fun didn't end there. As I was trying to pull my trunks up and get out of the ring, my foot caught on the ropes and I took a nosedive, and went down headfirst right on the concrete. I'm now lying there with my shorts down and my ass exposed for all to see. Just another day in wrestling paradise. Now, you might think what Jay did to me that night was mean and evil, but this is how wrestlers play.

Back in Los Angeles, I started to keep a .357 Magnum with me at all times. I was into "fast drawing" the gun. York, an ex-marine, and I were always talking about firearms. One day I was at the gym and I left my pistol in my room at the Flamingo. I came back and the maids had found the gun and were all standing around causing this big commotion.

One of the rules I had been taught was that you should always keep the first chamber of your gun empty; this way, in case you hit the hammer accidentally, a round won't go off and hit somebody. In the next chamber you put a blank because if someone was coming, you can go ahead and shoot at them with the blank without having to worry about killing them. If they're still coming you're going to need the other four rounds! I stuck by this rule religiously.

Anyway, the maids had pulled the trigger and fired the blank, thank the good Lord! They were all looking for the lead and for dead people, I guess, and I tried to calm them all down before the police were called. If the police had come into my apartment that day, I would have been in a world of trouble.

The messed-up thing about my life at this point was that even though I was having more success than I ever imagined, I was also more reckless than I had ever been. I was portrayed as a rebel in the ring and started living up to the role outside of the ring. I became the image, despite the consequences. I couldn't see right from wrong at the time. All I know was that I went from driving a piece-of-shit Vega to a Caprice Classic almost overnight. My world wasn't about morals. No, the world of wrestling had its own code.

The code was powerful and it fucked up most of my life. I gave an oath, my word and my honor, to protect the sport of professional wrestling. As I tell you these things now, I'm having trouble because this code was so instilled in me. These men were and still are my family, my Frat Brothers. I swore to protect them and watch their backs under all circumstances. This has cost me a lot of money and many sleepless nights in my career. But for better or for worse, this code defined my life.

Wrestling has taught me many lessons: You always give 110 percent in your match. When you're finished, never make contact with the promoter, just get away from him. Never back down or take a back step, always hold your ground, no retreat, no surrender.

Wrestling also gave me my identity. I was never a "character." I was Roddy Piper. Nothing about me or my life was a show. Professional wrestling is not phony. The outcome may be predetermined, yes, but how you get there is your business and your pain. It is very real. The truth is, wrestling is very competitive and only the best get to the top. Wrestling took this kid, Roderick George Toombs, and formed him into the man known as "Rowdy" Roddy Piper.

The more aggressive I was, the better I did. The more aggressive I was, the more people backed off, and I felt more comfortable, especially doing television interviews. I know now that this aggression was a mask, a shield. Under my tough-guy exterior, I'm a very tender guy with feelings, but with my mask on, no one could hurt me.

Over time I learned to become a one-man survival team. If there is one thing I've learned in life, it's that at the end of the day I am all alone, nobody really gives a damn. It's either do or die. And this philosophy is my biggest nemesis. From what I have been taught, being a coward is so shameful that I would rather die than have people perceive me as one.

5

Ribbing on the Square

My becoming a loner with a do-or-die attitude allowed me to pick my game up a notch. Being on the apron every night was becoming routine; either I was kicking an opponent's ass in a match or I was part of a riot. The more aggressive I was on the mat and mike, the more I was getting recognized in the industry. But this aggression wasn't an act; it was honest. I had finally found a way to release all these pent-up emotions that were locked inside of me. My performances in the ring were getting a lot of attention on the West Coast and the word was getting back to promoters across the country. Mike LeBell was like a reporter on the beat, informing wrestling bigwigs like Vince McMahon Sr., one of the top dogs in the East, and other promoters of big networks how popular I was becoming and how much money I was drawing. Even though I was a heel, I was a crowd favorite. My unique personality and fighting style drew fans to the arena in record numbers.

The buzz became so strong that McMahon Sr. wanted me to come to New York to wrestle in Madison Square Garden. Everyone seemed to hear about it before I did. Word spread all over the country that this "boy wonder" was going to New York. It was a big deal because I was just twenty years old; they never had anyone in New York this young that they would consider as a main-eventer. I remember when LeBell told me. He asked, "Kid, what does MSG mean to you?"

"It's something they put in Chinese food that's bad for you," I answered.

"No. What does MSG mean to you?"

"Mike, it don't mean nothing to me."

Mike was beginning to turn red. "Madison Square Garden! I got you booked in Madison Square Garden!"

So I was off to the Big Apple.

As it turned out, I would not only get to experience wrestling at the Garden, I would also learn another hard and valuable lesson as I became the victim of a common practice in the industry called "ribbing on the square." Despite not having anything to do with physical contact, ribbing on the square is one of the most lethal weapons in professional wrestling. It is a form of warfare disguised as humor. As you can imagine, these ribs can do serious damage to one's psyche.

Ribbing is practiced industry-wide. Wrestlers do it, promoters do it, but the intent is always the same: to bring the unsuspecting victim to his knees, and in some cases even to get rid of him.

I remember one time, there was this wrestler in Portland who was constantly getting over, and he felt he was underpaid. He was always riding his promoter, trying to get more money, but the P didn't want to pay him.

At this time the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) used to hold these annual conferences in Vegas, and all the territory owners would go to these closed sessions where they talked about how to keep the wrestlers' salaries down. They didn't want some wrestler from the West Coast talking to some guy from the East and comparing their salaries; they wanted it to seem like they were all earning the same. It was just organized tyranny.

So at this conference, the promoter from Portland said that a particular wrestler was giving him a hard time about making more money. The promoter from Kansas City agreed to help him and a few weeks later showed up at an event in Portland. After the match, he called over the problem wrestler and said, "Gee, man, you were great. I could really use someone like you. What are you getting paid here?" Now, the wrestler thought this was his opportunity. He told the guy that he was unhappy in Portland, that he didn't feel like he was being treated well. So the promoter said to him, "Look, why don't you do the right thing? Give your notice . . . you don't want to burn any bridges. Then move your wife and kids to Kansas City. We'll find you a nice house, we have great schools, and you'll be set." So that's what the wrestler did. He packed up his family and moved.

They booked him once in Kansas City, but then they never used him again. So now this guy is out of a job, he just bought a new home, uprooted his kids, and all so that the promoters could remind him who was boss. Ribs like this tend to mess up your day a bit.

I had experienced ribbing before in my career, but in New York I would get a lesson that I wouldn't soon forget.

As soon as LeBell booked me in New York, he started burning up the phone lines to let everyone and their mother know that I was going to be wrestling at Madison Square Garden. Promoters were coming in from all over the world . . . Japan . . . Germany . . . Everyone who was anyone was going to be there to see this "boy wonder" who was selling out all over the West Coast.

In preparation for my trip, I started bulking up, trying to put on a little extra weight. I trained real hard. New York was a big man's territory, where there were people like Andre the Giant, who was seven-four and weighed in at 520 pounds, and Superstar Billy Graham. There wasn't anybody there wrestling under 280 pounds, so basically I was a midget going into a giant's world. I was six-foot-one and my weight at this time was 210 pounds, so I knew I had to start training in a different way to put a little bulk on.

Another thing I did to get ready for New York was go shopping. I bought this sharp three-quarter-length leather jacket. It cost a couple of hundred dollars, which was a lot of money for me then, but I got it because I wanted to make a good impression on everyone. Actually, I had no clothes except for one green corduroy suit, a pair of jeans, and my moccasins, so I felt I had to splurge a little in order to make myself appear successful.

When the day came for me to pack up and go, I had Killer Brooks drive me to the airport. We got there, he drove me straight to the door, but then I paused for a second and something in my gut told me something was wrong, that I shouldn't go. So I turned to Killer and said, "Take me home." He was like, "What? What are you talking about?" I just told him I wanted to go home. Killer just sat in the driver's seat looking at me like I had grown two heads or something. "Are you fucking crazy? This is Madison Square Garden!"

I just said, "Killer, I don't know. I'm just going by my gut. Take me home."

He reluctantly took me home, and in order to get myself off the hook with LeBell and McMahon, I lied, telling them there was bad weather for my connecting flight to New York and I couldn't make it. This is the only time in my entire wrestling history when I chickened out. I just had a gut feeling. I just didn't want to go.

I thought that was the end of that, but the next week when I came back into the Olympic Auditorium, Mike LeBell ran up to me and said, "Hey, don't worry. I got you rebooked on the next card in Madison Square Garden." I immediately said to myself, "Motherfucker. Are you kidding me? I don't want to go."

The Garden had a wrestling event once every three or four weeks, and Mike had taken it upon himself to get me on the very next card. Now I was even more scared to go to New York. Why? I don't know. You can ask Sigmund and his brother Freud. Maybe they have the answer. All I knew was I had to go to New York to wrestle and I really didn't want to. But now what was I supposed to do? Here was a guy helping me out and getting me my biggest break thus far so I could make a name for myself and I was trying to figure out every way possible to sabotage my journey. Was I fucking crazy? This was a chance of a lifetime. And now that Mike had put his ass on the line and rebooked me, there was no way I could back down on him two times in a row, especially if I wanted to stay in the sport. Finally, I got the nerve to go to Madison Square Garden, where I learned a real rough lesson that toughened me up both as a human being and as a professional wrestler.

I arrived in the city and made my way to the arena. I have to admit I was pretty nervous, but I put a good mask on. Backstage, I was greeted by the nicest people. I remember Captain Lou Albano, Freddie Blassie, the Grand Wizard, Domenic Denucci, and some of the other wrestlers going out of their way, making sure I was comfortable.

Captain Lou, Freddie, and the Grand Wizard even went as far as coming up to me and saying, "Hey, kid, we've been watching you on TV. We don't want you here; you're too good." They were all laughing, and I thought, "Oh, isn't that nice, what a nice compliment." They wished me good luck and patted me on the back. So I'm thinking; "Hey, what was I so afraid of? This isn't too bad."

I went about my business getting ready for my big match. I went into the locker room and looked for the farthest corner I could find. I put on my kilt and boots and then grabbed my bagpipes to get it ready for the evening's performance. The bagpipes are a woodwind instrument, so before you play them you have to get the reeds wet. This process can be quite annoying, especially when you're in the confines of a small dressing room with other wrestlers. But I had been doing this my whole career, and after getting over the initial shock of the sounds, none of the guys ever really seemed to mind.

But what I didn't realize was that this was a different set of wrestlers on a different coast. The guys I was around before when

I got my bagpipes ready were friends, mentors, and father figures. The guys in the New York locker room were strangers. While I initially thought everyone at the event was making an effort to be nice and to make me feel at home, I would find out the hard way that they were really just ribbing me through their smiles.

My time to shine was moments away. I was all dressed and ready to go, and I played my pipes a little in the hallway before I went on. I also wanted to warm up a bit before my match, so about ten minutes before I was slated to wrestle, I left my bagpipes in the dressing room and went off to do some push-ups out in the hall, trying to get a quick pump. I wanted to look as big as I could. After all, folks, as you remember, I'm a midget in a giant's business. After doing a couple hundred push-ups, I was ready to go and went back to the room to pick up my bagpipes and made my way up the runway to the famous ring.

When my opponent and I entered the ring for the second match of the night, the announcer asked the crowd to be quiet. He told them they were about to be treated to a special rendition of the Scottish national anthem on the bagpipes played by Roddy Piper. It took about three or four minutes to get the sold-out crowd settled—it's hard to get twenty-four-thousand New Yorkers to shut up when they've paid thirty-five dollars apiece to scream. Finally they're quiet, and all eyes are on me. The promoters are all fixed on me. I could also see other wrestlers peeking through the curtains into the arena trying to get a look. They all came out wanting to see what was so special about this "boy wonder."

Having all the confidence in the world at that moment, I blew up the bagpipes to start to play. I blew and I squeezed. I blew and I squeezed. I blew and squeezed that bag as hard as I could with my left elbow, but no sound was coming out. I'm thinking to myself, "What the hell is going on? What's wrong with my pipes?" I continued to blow and my face turned red. I looked over at the announcer, who was holding the mike and he was just waiting. My opponent was getting impatient. And I certainly wasn't getting a good reception from the crowd. They were like, "Send the amateur home. We came to see professional wrestling."

Finally, frustration and embarrassment took over and I dropped my bagpipes and charged the guy. I pinned him within two or three minutes and then I left the ring and went back to my dressing room, trying to figure out what had gone wrong. Here I was, a kid from nowhere on the world's biggest stage with some of the world's biggest wrestlers, and I flat out bombed. The crowd was looking for me to play the bagpipes and then give them a good wrestling match, and what did I give them? Nothing. The only thing that blew that day was me in the ring. I went back to the dressing room and sat staring down at the floor, too embarrassed to even look anyone in the eyes.

When all was said and done, Vince McMahon Sr. basically said, via messenger, "Don't call us, we'll call you." It was the first black mark against my talent, and that night I became probably the biggest joke in the industry for at least the next month.

On the plane back to Los Angeles, I examined my bagpipes, trying to figure out what was wrong with them. The raw anger I had felt in the ring came back to me when I stuck my hand in the chanter and pulled out a wad of toilet paper six feet long. Son of a bitch! I found out later that Freddie Blassie was the one who had done the dirty deed. That lousy bastard and all the rest of them were all smiling and laughing in the dressing room with me beforehand, but I found out the hard way that the last laugh was on me.

It took years for the real story of what happened that night to come out. And I realize now that when they joked, "We don't want you here; you're too good. We want to keep our jobs," they really meant it. Those guys were intimidated by me. They were scared I was gonna move in on their territory. Knowing this is a small consolation, though. The damage was done. I had bombed for the first time ever in my career and was the laughingstock of the industry. The incident was humiliating, but what was worse was the realization that I had been manipulated by some of the best in the sport of wrestling, and they had robbed me of a young boy's dream of being on top in the biggest territory in the world. It would be at least ten years before I was invited back to wrestle in New York.

That night in Madison Square Garden was a really tough lesson for me. Many years later I did an episode of *Walker, Texas Ranger,* and became good friends with the star of the show, Chuck Norris. Chuck and I got along really well not only because we were both actors and athletes, but also because we both had mutual feelings about practical jokes. During our friendship, we exchanged industry stories, both good and bad, and I remember he once said to me that he didn't like people making him the brunt of their jokes. I told him that I was the same way, and proceeded to let him in on the humiliating incident in New York.

I let him know that they had really hurt my feelings, and I was even more mad at myself for letting them get past my mask. But I knew that somehow I had to recover because a sensitive wrestler just wouldn't make it. I explained to Chuck that it made me have a rhino skin that just got thicker and thicker. Looking back on the experience, I know the New York gig tainted me, and that it was a hell of a lesson to learn and a tough way to learn it. But it never happened to me again. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.

Another infamous "rib war" happened earlier in my career and almost cost a wrestler his life—twice. The ribbing involved two wrestlers who wound up getting way too carried away with their mischievous deeds, almost leading to disaster. One of the wrestlers who was involved in this rib was Johnny Valentine. He was this big guy who would come to the ring with this long robe, and he would just stare at the fans. They would go nuts! They believed in Johnny and everything he was about in the ring. He would just take a man and push the guy's head back and pound the dog out of him! I remember watching Johnny wrestle when I was a young wrestler in Houston and we'd be on the same card. He was always amazing.

The other player in the incident was Jay "The Alaskan" York, who I'd hung out with in L.A. Jay was about six-foot-six, had a bald head and beard, and wore a big open Pendleton shirt showing off his huge hairy chest. He also had a big-ass belt around him, and wore jeans with lineman boots with a buck knife hanging on his hip. Oh yeah, I almost forgot his most important accessory, his twelve-foot bullwhip, which, if you recall, had saved me from that crazed witch and her cult at the Renaissance fair.

At one time these two were working in the same territory, so they started ribbing each other back and forth—all in fun and games. Valentine, for example, used to love to shit in wrestlers' shoes. He had a very special and unique talent that I have never seen duplicated to this day. When shitting in the unsuspecting victim's shoes, he could top off his masterpiece with the perfect Dairy Queen whip every time. Now try and imagine this scene for a second. You've got this mammoth monster not only doing his dirty business in this poor soul's shoes, he's also wiggling his bum to get that perfect whip on there! Classic stuff! You just can't make up something like that!

As if the shit in the shoes wasn't enough, another time, on the road in Canada, Johnny took a garden hose, ran it from a kitchen to York's brand-new Cadillac convertible, and filled the convertible up with water—in Canada, during the winter! Needless to say, York had a block of ice in his car in the morning.

About a month later Jay retaliated. While Johnny was out drinking in an all-night club, Jay hired a welding truck and had Valentine's car welded with angle iron to the parking meters. I remember Jay telling me that he waited until 4 A.M. for Johnny to stagger out of the bar to find his car. Jay said that Val was so drunk that he didn't even notice what had been done. Then Valentine got in his car and started it up, thinking he was going to pull away. But it wasn't to be. Johnny put the car in drive and hit the gas and tried getting out of his spot, causing sparks to fly everywhere and the smell of burning rubber to pollute the air. Maybe Val was too drunk to notice even this because he still tried to get out of the spot by putting the car in reverse. Again no luck. Johnny then got out of the car to go back into the bar to call a tow truck because he thought something was wrong with his car. As he stepped out, he tripped over the angle iron, causing him to curse and scream.

Now it was Johnny's turn again.

Johnny had a Halliburton, which was a type of locking suitcase that all the wrestlers wanted but couldn't afford. A Rolex and a Halliburton were signs of success, and Johnny had them both. Whenever we wrestled, we would give Valentine whatever valuables we had and he would lock them in his case for safekeeping.

Since Valentine was the main-event draw, he was always on last, and he spent most of the night in the dressing room while everyone else was wrestling in the arena. So one night Johnny was in the locker room, and he noticed that Jay York left his inhaler out. Jay had asthma and after a match he would have to take a few puffs on this breathing device to get his wind back. Valentine took the inhaler—Jay was in the ring wrestling at this point—and dumped out the medicine and filled it with lighter fluid. When Jay came back from the ring looking for a breather, he reached for his inhaler and took a couple of big puffs and immediately fell to the ground convulsing. He couldn't breathe.

By this time Johnny was in the ring wrestling for his usual forty- to fifty-minute match. When Jay finally came to, he figured out what had happened. He was steaming mad and he quickly got dressed, went out to his truck, and grabbed his sawed-off shotgun and put it under his trench coat.

He came back into the dressing room and Valentine was in the shower. When Val stepped out of the shower, Jay opened his trench coat and leveled the sawed-off shotgun at him. Jay was going to kill him. Valentine just stared at Jay, looked into his eyes, and started laughing, like he didn't believe Jay would pull the trigger. Something in Johnny's laugh snapped Jay out of it, and he sort of came to his senses. But he was still pissed as hell, so he pointed the shotgun at Johnny's Halliburton and blasted a fucking hole in it six inches wide, causing everybody's jewelry, wallets, and valuables to be blown away. There were also twelve wrestlers who were deaf for two days after that loud blast! Jay told me later that the thing that saved Val's life was when they made eye contact. If Val hadn't started laughing in disbelief, Jay would have shot him.

While Johnny didn't realize that Jay had been dead serious the night before, he came to that conclusion the next morning when his car wouldn't start. He stepped out of the car and opened the hood—only to find dynamite wired to the distributor. But Jay did him a favor by disconnecting the distributor, saving him from blowing to bits. Also under the hood was a note saying: "See how close you came?!"

The two men finally got together and said enough is enough.

Or so we thought.

A few months go by and Johnny is in the shower after a match. Harley Race and a bunch of the other wrestlers are in the locker room shooting the breeze when Jay York comes storming in as Valentine is just walking out of the shower. York yells, "You son of a bitch, I told you never to fuck with me again! I told you I'd kill your ass!" Then he pulls out a .357 Magnum from under his jacket, points it at Val, and shoots.

Well, it looks like a bullet hit Johnny, as there's blood everywhere in the stall and he's hunched over shaking in the corner of the shower grabbing his chest. York is now slowly looking around like he's flipped. What Jay didn't know was that Harley Race, who was on his far right-hand side, had reached down and gotten on his own piece and hid it under his towel. Harley tells York to put the gun down, but Jay doesn't listen. Unbeknownst to Jay, Harley then reaches under his towel and puts his finger on the trigger of his gun and again orders York to put his weapon down. But Jay just wasn't listening. Just as Harley was about to shoot Jay, Valentine starts laughing, gets up, and walks out of the shower, showing everyone the wrappers from packs of ketchup he got from the concession stand.

The other wrestlers and I were all amazed, not only at how real the incident looked, but also how close Jay came to being blasted by Harley! But I should have known. What did I say the rules of a .357 Magnum were? First chamber empty, second one blank . . . but that bastard York had us all fooled.

Valentine was a master both in and out of the ring. He took a liking to me and I'll never forget a piece of advice he gave me. He said, "I can't make them believe that wrestling is for real, but I sure as hell can make them believe I am." I took those words to heart, and from that moment on based my entire career on them.

After three and a half years, it was time for me to say good-bye to Los Angeles and Leo Garibaldi and Judo Gene LeBell and hello to Portland, Oregon, and my old-time wrestling friend Buddy Rose and local promoter Don Owens. I first met Buddy when he started wrestling in the AWA for Verne Gagne. I hadn't seen him for years, but then he started coming to L.A. to go to the racetrack. Rose had been wrestling in Portland and he was the biggest star they had at the time. He had once made me an offer to come to Portland to wrestle, but I turned him down. But the more I thought about the offer, the more I liked it. I knew that in order to get to the top of my sport, I had to keep on going and get bigger and bigger and bigger.

It was a big step for me. It was one of the hardest things I had to do at that point in my career because L.A. was the first place where I had gotten over as a solid main-eventer. And to leave and go somewhere where I wasn't known and start all over again took a lot of courage. What was I, nuts? I was already king in L.A. Why would I want to leave the biggest entertainment town in the world to go wrestle in front of a bunch of Trailblazers? And how was I going to tell LeBell and Garibaldi? It's easier to give your notice when you're not drawing money and your promoters and bookers haven't built the territory around you. But when they build the cards and matches around you, it sorta makes you feel like you owe them something.

These two top-notch men had helped me so much with my career. Leo, a bona fide wrestling genius, prepared me mentally for the ring, while Judo Gene took over my physical training. Under their guidance, I was able to develop my own style of wrestling—a style that would help me put the "Rowdy" in Roddy Piper. Because of them I formed a kind of wrestling that was like street fighting. It was during this time that I developed a wrestling technique that people were all of a sudden talking about, one that was not technical at all. It had some really unorthodox moves—a lot of kicking, trying to take your foe's eyes out, putting your finger inside your opponent's mouth and trying to rip the skin out, cross-facing, choking, and gurgling—all stuff that wasn't seen nightly in regular professional matches. But despite having mixed emotions about the move to Portland, I decided to go for it. I may not have been blessed with a lot of common sense, but nobody can ever accuse me of not having humongous balls.

After three and a half years together, all Leo told me before I left was, "Thanks for all the blood and guts, kid." He didn't even shake my hand. That's just the nature of the sport. Wrestlers come and go and you try not to get too close. But Leo and Gene gave me the tools I needed to succeed. I left Los Angeles a consummate professional wrestler, ready for any kind of action, baby—as Pedro Morales used to say. I was ready to take on anybody and anything, and I was afraid of nothing.

4

The Portland Years

THE next challenge in my wrestling career would take place on the Oregon circuit. I hopped into my brand-spanking-new silver Caprice Classic and said good-bye to L.A. and hello to Portland. In keeping with tradition, when I reached the city limits, I opened up my window to alert the new town that Roddy Piper had arrived. But this time something was different. Instead of having to roll my window down, I just had to push a button, because now I was driving with power—both in my car and in my career. Once I felt the cool Oregon breeze, I stuck my head out of my Caprice and yelled, "Look out, Portland, here I come, and I'm going to kick your fucking ass!" Of course no one heard me but God. After all, who else was listening? And moreover, who else cared?

I then made my way into town and hooked up with Buddy Rose. He would introduce me to Don Owens and his brother Elton, who was also a promoter, controlling the Eugene, Medford, and Salem promotions. During my time in Oregon, I would find Don Owens to be one of the fairer promoters in the professional wrestling business. In my eyes, he and Paul Bosch were tops. However, Elton was a character and was down there with the low of the low. He was an oddball. He would always introduce himself to people by saying, "Hello, I'm Don Owens's brother Elton." And everything about this guy was bad. He wore a bad toupee that looked like poodle roadkill, smoked cheap cigars, and was a heavy drinker. He paid the wrestlers off in dollar bills and rolls of quarters and would watch your facial expressions while he forked over the cash. The established guys there—Stan Stasiak, Johnny Eagles, Jonathan Boyd, Killer Brooks, and Jimmy Snuka—all tipped me off about what to do when Elton was paying me. They said to never smile because the reason he would stare at you when he was paying you was that he was waiting for you to crack a smile. And the minute your lips turned upward and you looked happy, Elton would stop the cash flow right there, figuring you were satisfied with your payout. It's safe to say that he wasn't very popular with the guys.

Elton also had one other quirk. In every match he wanted us to shoot for the first minute or so. He would give twenty-five dollars to the winner and fifteen to the loser. The object of this shoot was to pin your opponent for a one-count, which enabled the prick to determine the winner. What that old fuck didn't know was that we got together before the match and agreed to split the forty dollars. The way we determined who was going to be pinned for the one-count was very simple: we flipped a coin just like they do before the kickoff of every NFL game. We really didn't give a shit who won the toss or shoot, we just wanted half the cash.

After every match, Elton would come into the locker room and say, "Oh boys, that was a hell of a shoot." At the end of the day everyone was happy. We got to split the money and Elton got a hard-on. I guess he never heard of Viagra.

Other than Buddy, one of the first wrestlers I came into contact with in Portland was "Killer" Tim Brooks, who was also known as "The Waxahachie Wildman." Besides helping me get started on the

Oregon beat, it was Tim who was to introduce me to the love of my life, Kitty.

Killer was a wonderful man who had hair all over his body—except on his head. And he loved to smoke these little cigars. He was the full wrestling package in more ways than one. The promoters both loved and hated to have him on their cards. Brooks was a hot commodity who could help sell out a territory in an instant, but he was also a time bomb that was waiting to explode. The cigar-loving grappler had a rebel side in him that was great in the ring but dangerous outside of it.

Despite the cigar stench he reeked of, I took an instant liking to him; especially when he and I teamed up to play some nasty tricks on Elton Owens. Killer Brooks was surely one of a kind.

One of the finer memories I have of my time with Killer was when we were wrestling on a card in Salem for Elton. It was in a dirty building that had old dried-up blood on the floors and walls in the cruddy dressing rooms from years of use and abuse by wrestlers. It was definitely one of the worst facilities either of us had ever wrestled in, but we tried to make the best of the situation. Unfortunately Elton had a way of making a bad situation worse. One night, just as we're all getting ready to go out and give the Salem people their money's worth, Elton strolls into the locker room, sucking on one of his cheap cigars, and starts running his mouth. At one point he gets so wrapped up in what he's saying that he takes his cigar out of his mouth and puts it down on one of the tables in the dressing room so he can rant and rave about the night's matches. Elton is so busy yelling at us that he doesn't notice Killer grab the cigar and stick the lip end up his own ass and twist it around a couple of times, and then put it right back where he found it. Now, folks, I swear this is the truth. About five minutes later Elton finishes his rant, turns and picks up his cigar, and puts it in his mouth. We were all holding in our laughter, trying to keep a straight face. Watching Owens suck on that ass-wiped cigar, I was dying inside. Holding in the laughter was so hard that my eyes started watering. Elton looked at me with a puzzled expression and asked me what was the matter. I didn't dare say a word because I was afraid I'd just burst out laughing. So I just shrugged my shoulders. Elton just shook his head and told us to hurry up and get ready for the next match. As he was walking out of the locker room, he took a big puff of his cigar and muttered, "Aaaugh! It smells like shit in here." It's times like that you just don't forget!

Another crappy Elton Owens story came when we were wrestling in Roseburg, Oregon. Again the cheap son of a bitch booked us to wrestle in a dump. This place didn't even have locker rooms, just a big stage that everybody used to change on. To make matters worse, there weren't even any showers. In order to get cleaned up after the match, we had to walk through the crowd, past the hot-dog stand, and take turns using the sinks that they had kept the hot dogs in. Now just imagine the scene after the match: a bunch of sweaty, smelly wrestlers are all trying to share this little ol' sink. Let me tell you, it wasn't a pretty sight.

Another thing that wasn't pretty was that there were no bathrooms close to the stage. In order to reach the toilet, we again had to make our way through the crowd, past the hot-dog guy and past the sink. Well, it just so happens that I had to go to the bathroom right before I was supposed to go on. There was no way I was going to make that trek down through the arena, through all the people who hated me and who I was about to perform in front of. It would have been easier if I had to take a piss; I could have found a corner or bottle anywhere. But number two was going to be tricky. So I found a dark spot on the corner of the stage, took a brown paper bag, pulled my trunks down, and proceeded to take a monstrous shit, hoping to hit the bag. But as I'm squatting, Elton decides to come up onstage. Thinking quickly, I hold the corner of the bag and start doing free squats, with my trunks just far enough up to cover my front. As he comes by, he stops for a second and, thinking I'm doing exercises before I go on, says, "Ah, you're a good kid, always staying in shape. But jeez, it smells like shit in here!" Elton left and

I finished my dump and threw the bag over by the furnace, and then I went on to wrestle.

Killer and I were not only sharing laughs together at this time, we also were living together. Johnny Eagles had helped Killer and me find a lovely place in the same apartment complex where he was living. The two-bedroom place was very nice—at least before *we* started living in it.

The two of us did pretty well for ourselves while we were living together, both in the ring and on the social scene. There was one girl in particular who left a lasting impression on me. Killer Brooks had this girlfriend we called "Wombat." Whenever he wanted to sow his oats, he'd go into his room with Wombat. To tell you the truth, I don't really know what went on behind those closed doors because I was doing my own thing, but in all honesty I didn't want to know. I would wake up early every Saturday morning to go to the gym because there would be all this "funk" in that apartment—tons of empty beer bottles and cans, cigar butts, and what looked like spit on the floor. What these two did nobody knows, but shit was starting to grow in there, man! And to top it off, there was this terrible aroma that filled the apartment that seemed to exude from Killer's room after a night of combat.

Wombat was a nice-looking girl and all, but what she could be doing with Killer and to Killer was beyond me. When I'd come back from the gym she would be gone, so I hardly ever saw her. But one time Wombat came over to the apartment to see Killer and he wasn't there. One thing led to another and I "fiddled" with her. After I did the nasty, I felt bad for making it with my roommate's girl. So I did the honorable thing that a wrestler would do and decided I wouldn't tell him. It would just cause animosity between us and, more importantly, make my life a living hell. I would have to sleep with one eye open each night, afraid that Killer would come into my room and pull a Lorena Bobbitt.

Well, I soon found out that I didn't need Killer for that. I kept my little secret from my big friend for about a week until I noticed this thing starting to grow on the base of my penis. I swear to you, it had lungs of its own and was getting bigger and nastier looking by the day. I know I had a big decision to make: Do I tell Killer about what happened, hoping that he'll not only forgive me, but also provide me with some info on how to get this alien off my dick? Or do I say nothing, let my dick fall off, and live the rest of my life penisless? Hell, I knew the answer right away . . . I'm telling Killer!

So finally I had the balls to tell Brooks. I approached him and said: "Killer, I've got a confession." I pulled my pants down, and he goes, "Ah, you've been with Wombat. That's okay, but we're gonna have to fix that." I was relieved. Killer was not mad at me, and more importantly, he had a remedy for my Wombat-itus. He tells me to sit down and he comes back holding this white-hot needle, that he just heated up on the stove, holding it with a pair of pliers.

As soon as I saw him holding that steaming needle with the pliers, I jumped up out of my seat and said, "Whoa, Killer! What are you going to do with that?" He tells me to "sit down, drop your pants down, and pull your dick out." I then said, "Killer, are you sure about this?" The next thing I know he jabbed that needle into the alien—damn, that hurt!—and squeezed it so hard I thought it was going to burst! But he came through for me in a big way. While I still have the scar from that memorable prick, the disease never showed its ugly ass again, so I owed Killer big-time for helping me out.

As for Killer and me, the only problem we had was during our first meeting. If we were going to be a pair, we had to decide what we were going to do on the wrestling circuit. Both of us had been wrestling as heels throughout our careers, and Buddy Rose was also a heel at the time and was the main draw in the Oregon area. So the three of us had a powwow to try and decide how we were going to solve this problem. There were too many chiefs and not enough Indians. We had a choice to make here: we could try to cut one another's throat for the biggest piece of the pie, or we could come up with an arrangement that we were all comfortable with so each of us could come away with an equal slice. We decided that Buddy Rose and his partner, Ed Wiskowski, would be the main heels and we would become another entity. I started out my career in Portland with everyone hating me, but would make an about-face in almost no time, becoming a well-liked wrestler with the Oregon fans.

The first night I was in Portland I wrestled Johnny Eagles on live TV. People had never seen anything like me before. From the bagpipes to the kilt, they didn't know what the hell to expect from me. They were used to seeing these veterans grapple the old-fashioned way. They weren't used to seeing a young kid go full throttle, looking for more and more action.

What was also amazing and unique at this time in my career was that I didn't tell the people how to feel about me. I just did my thing on the mat and let the people make up their own mind. This is where the real depth, psychology, and foundation for Roddy Piper was born. I was fearless. This was also the second place where I could free-fall and further develop the interviews I started in L.A., establishing rules such as "nobody tells me what to say in an interview." While living in Los Angeles, I once ran into Ella Fitzgerald and she gave me a great piece of advice: "Give them a good beginning and a great ending, and they will forgive a lot in between!" The lady had it down.

At this point in my career I had ascertained that interviews were 75 percent of professional wrestling. So on any given night my interviews had the power to make people who were sitting home and watching me on TV get so pissed off that they would elbow their wives in disbelief, then get up, get in the car, drive to the arena, pay to park, buy a handful of tickets and some popcorn, and get in their seats to yell at me while I was in the ring for my match. So when the night was over everybody went home happy. I would go back to my hotel room with their money and they would go home smiling because they'd been able to air out their frustrations.

How did I rile these fans up so bad? you ask. Well, it all stemmed from my unique style of wrestling interviews that was still in development at this time. Yes, I had reached a certain level of skill on the mike while I was in L.A., but now I was given free rein in Portland to try and further develop my unique style, which incorporated current events into my interviews. What was going on around town or in the world always seemed to strike a nerve in people. I also put honesty into my interviews. The technique I started to adapt to professional wrestling was one that was both direct and subliminal. For example, one time after an annual event, the Portland Rose Festival, where they have all these floats similar to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, I did an interview that was full of double entendres. I took advantage of some poor unfortunate boob who was supposed to measure all the floats before the event began on Saturday morning to make sure they would fit down the blocks of the parade route. But he must have been asleep at the wheel because as the pipe bands were playing and all the normal hoo-hah that goes on in American parades was taking place, a rolling exhibit tried to turn the corner, but found out too late that it couldn't fit.

On TV that night, I started mocking the whole situation of a float getting stuck. I said to the now-attentive crowd: "Let me get this straight. You people got a float in a parade that can't even get around the corner. How stupid are you? Don't you know that the square pegs don't go in the round holes . . . ?" and as I am doing this I'm lifting the sporran of my kilt. I am insinuating some type of sexual meaning by this gesture, but I'm talking about something totally different.

Then I ripped into the guy who was supposed to measure the floats. What kind of brain surgeon was he? I then take the remark a couple of steps further by questioning the local politicians and teachers: "These are the same people I'm paying taxes to, the same people I'm trusting to teach my children in school? You want me to put my children in a school in a town that can't figure out how to get a float around the corner in the biggest event of the year?" Fact of the matter was, I was twenty-three years old and didn't even have any kids. The crowd got so mad. They all took what I was saying to heart. The people of Portland thought I was calling the whole town stupid—you bet your ass I was!

While in Portland, I worked on a TV show that was taped in front of a live audience and aired on Saturday nights. Knowing how I could really rile up a crowd, Don Owens expected me to do an interview in the Crow's Nest (an elevated platform above the ring where the night's host conducted interviews for all to see) each show; the only restriction I had was a time limit that was due to the length of the program. In order to get my point across I had to do some new things. So to better prepare, I started talking out loud in the car more and also started writing things down. I became an innovator of the concise and educated wrestling interview, which I was now treating as a kind of art form.

People were getting into my interviews so much that they were taking everything I said as gospel. If I said it, they believed it. I was getting more attention than I could ever have hoped for. The fans were now watching and imitating my every move. Just to give you an idea of what was going on at the time, one night after I had cleared the ring during a televised match, I got up on the second turnbuckle and I raised both my eyebrows twice in celebration for what I had just done. Little did I know that the cameraman had a close-up of my face right at that particular moment. After that, for about a month, every place that I went, people would come up to me and raise their eyebrows.

It was just this little thing I did accidentally, and now wrestling fans everywhere were copying me. It made me realize how intently people were paying attention to me. But with this awareness came responsibility. I felt pressure not to let the fans down.

Fans appreciated the seriousness and value of the interviews. The show became a real moneymaker. It brought the wrestling interview to new heights. People were actually coming and paying their hard-earned money more for the interview than for the wrestling. This became more evident later in a show called *Piper's Pit*, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Now, because of the interviews and all of the new things we all were doing on the show, Don Owens received the highest ratings that he had ever gotten in the thirty-year history of the program.

I was always looking for new ways to make my segments better—things that would leave an impression on the audience. One night I remembered a trick I learned while I was wrestling in the Canadian Maritimes. This guy called the Beast taught it to me. This piece of business involved breaking a full bottle of Heineken beer over your head. I had never tried it but I had seen the Beast do it. I just never had any desire or need to smash myself in the head with a green bottle of beer. What a waste of beer! But now I decided to give it a go on live TV. I didn't tell anyone. This was another cardinal rule of mine: never tell anyone what I was planning to do.

When the time came for my interview, I broke the full bottle of beer against my forehead to promote an upcoming match. The impact of the blood streaming down my face from glass cuts, and beer everywhere, was such that the audience made very sure they came to the match. And they wouldn't be disappointed because I took that intense aggressive energy into the ring and it guaranteed a good performance. I don't recommend you try this at home because if you don't swing the bottle hard enough, you'll simply knock yourself out.

About this time I also made it a rule never to talk about another wrestler's family. In these interviews I was developing, you had to have some serious rules because they could easily get too personal. For instance, I might tell a joke or a one-liner like: Do you know why Ric Flair sleeps with two girls at the same time? So that when he falls asleep they've got someone to talk to. Ric Flair is a married man. I always took the wrestler out of the context with his real family so that he wouldn't personally feel any emotion from the interview. But it didn't always work that way; people got pretty mad at some of the things I said and did. I was the first guy to put any significant premeditated psychology into the interviews. I also brought up anything close to my opponents that was real. I got very much in their faces. As Adrian Adonis once said to Vince McMahon Jr., "Piper shoots his mouth off in the interview, but he always goes and backs it up." This is another good rule of interviewing. Your interview must be in sync with your match. In other words, you must carry through into your match what you said beforehand. Otherwise your interview means nothing.

This was one of the secrets of drawing money; I'd get in the ring and back up what I'd say in interviews. This helped me become a fan favorite. I'd always have some reality base in every interview. Not just saying that I was going to rip a wrestler's lungs out, or that I was going to tear his eyes out; that's illegal, and we all know it's not going to happen in the ring. So I would base my threats on truth, on what I really could do to my opponent between the ropes.

But sometimes the truth isn't as it appears on television. One night in Portland, Buddy Rose stole my kilt after I took it off in the ring, on what was billed as live TV. The event was aired two hours after it was taped. This show had been live for years, this was only its third week of being broadcast on tape delay, and not too many people knew about it. Well, Rose proceeded to take my kilt up to the Crow's Nest for an interview while I was still in the ring. I stopped wrestling and kept looking up at the Crow's Nest, getting the crowd's attention, and together we watched Rose put lighter fluid on my kilt and set it on fire. Upon witnessing this travesty, I ran from the ring and headed up to the Crow's Nest. I attempted to put the fire out with my bare hands, burning myself in the process. When this came on TV, people started calling the fire department because they thought the building was going to burn down. By the time the fire department arrived, there was obviously nobody in the arena because the match had taken place two hours prior. It's safe to say that the fire marshal failed to see the humor of this, but it did hit the papers the next morning!

Another time Buddy Rose came into the ring with a coat hanger. He started choking me and dragging me around the ring, which truly hurt a lot and knocked the wind out of me, but thankfully, he let me live. In the process, I was taken back to the dressing room on a stretcher, and one of the old-timers took a yard of gauze, rolled it up and twisted it around my throat, and put his knee in the back of my head, then "sawed" the ropy gauze back and forth until it left a burn mark on my neck. That took about thirty seconds, and two minutes later I was back in the arena, barely able to speak and bleeding from the coat-hanger incident. The audience saw the blood and burn mark and it left a lasting impression on them. Now the fans were watching wrestling from a different perspective. While they had been viewing other matches and saying "Oh, that's phony," they were now tuning in to my matches and saying "Did you see what Roddy Piper did? It's real!" You see, folks, I was walking on a mighty fine line here, wasn't I?

My performances were now drawing in big money and crowds. My evolving style in the ring kept the audience confused and interested at the same time. It was impossible for anyone not living inside my head, and not being "in the know," to make the distinction between what was real and what was not. That and that alone was good enough to make people buy tickets.

I've often been asked how wrestling helped my acting ability. To be honest, it was probably the worst thing that I could have done. When the movie *They Live* came out in 1988, a critic (I learned over the years that critics can't do anything, they can only talk or write about doing things) for the *New York Post* wrote: "Anybody who thinks wrestlers are actors is wrong." That of course was a direct attack on my acting, but these are the same people who were criticizing my wrestling by writing that it was all acting. When I was on the mat I was considered an actor. When I was on the big screen I was called a wrestler. I don't think it was *me* who was confused. There's a simple explanation for this. Wrestling does *not* help acting.

You could say that acting is implosion, while wrestling is explosion. Basically they are opposite.

My performance in the squared circle caused people to react in different ways when they met me outside the arena. People don't know how to take wrestlers. In no other sport is the athlete on the spectators' TV staring at them and talking to them about their hometown, pissing them off, getting them angry. When people finally meet me in person, there are so many things going through their heads that they don't know how to react. I'm not the guy in the Super Bowl who ran for the winning touchdown. I'm not like the guy on the basketball court who scored a lot of baskets. I'm the guy who's been stabbed three times, who once wrestled a bear and who makes a living challenging people twice my size, so what do they say to me?

Anyway, I didn't only establish myself on the mike and on the camera while I was in Oregon. I also kicked some serious ass in the ring. Within three or four weeks on my new circuit, I had won every title the territory had to offer, including the Tag Team Championship with my partner Killer Brooks. Between the two of us we had so many title belts that we needed a wheelbarrow to carry them into the arena before our matches. As you can imagine, this always went over *real big* with our opponents. Wrestling was again starting to swell in popularity on the West Coast at this time, and I remember how people were talking about me being the tops out west and Ric Flair being the king of the East Coast. In Charlotte, North Carolina, Flair, like me, was kicking ass and gaining a reputation for himself.

The two of us had our promoters calling and bragging about our most recent performance each week. The first thing Don Owens did every Monday morning was brag to other promoters all across the wrestling world how he was selling out the Portland Sports Arena. The first question they would ask him was, "Well, who do you have on top?" And he would tell them: "This kid Piper."

Well, I don't know why they were shocked. Mike LeBell had been doing the same thing down in L.A. for three and a half years while I was there. Now Owens was selling out Portland, Oregon, for twenty-six weeks in a row! The buzz on Piper on the West Coast and Flair on the East Coast was showing that a new art had entered the world.

Around this time Killer Brooks introduced me to my future wife. It was so hard to meet any nice girls in our business. Just the number of miles we put in traveling around Oregon made a real relationship almost impossible. I'm not going to lie; we had women in every city and state we were in, but none of them were the type you'd want to settle down with. None of us had time to court a girl. Our weeks always looked the same. On Monday we'd usually make a trek out to Longview, which was sixty miles each way, then we'd wake up on Tuesday and make the long haul to Roseburg, which was a four-hundred-mile round-trip. Wednesday was even more of a killer, as we had to travel three-hundred miles each way to Medford. But we would catch a break on Thursdays because we only had to travel to Salem, which was about fifty miles away. Friday was Eugene, which was about 110 miles one way, and Saturday we'd be in Portland. Sunday was usually a rest or travel day, depending on our booking. There was no time for dating, just fun and games on the road. And let me tell you, I was definitely living up to the "Rowdy" nickname I had. The animal in me was really feeling the jungle beat. But even though I was partying the night away, something was missing. Even though I was a young, good-looking, popular, and successful wrestler, I still felt I wasn't complete.

One night Killer and I were driving home from a match and we were hungry. But we just couldn't stop anywhere to grab something to eat because number one, we wanted steak or some kind of meat, and number two, it was midnight and not too many places were open. Our only option was this place called Jo-Jo's on Sunset Highway in Portland.

So we pulled up to the joint and went inside to fill our empty stomachs. Little did I know that Jo-Jo's was going to be the place where I'd meet the girl of my dreams. I was sitting there eating my juicy steak when of all a sudden out of the corner of my eye I spotted this vision of loveliness. Around the corner came this little gal—she couldn't have been more than nineteen years old at the time—and I'll never forget that moment or what she was wearing. She had on a little Jo-Jo's uniform with a little brown skirt and her hair was up in a bun, and she was just real wholesome looking. She so impressed me that I blurted out, "You know, Killer, that's the kind of girl a guy would like to marry."

I had no intention of trying to meet her, let alone trying to talk to her, but Killer wouldn't hear any of that. He called her over, and he said in his best growling voice, "Hey, you. Beautiful. Come over here for a second." But at first she wouldn't come. As a matter of fact, she went straight over to her manager and asked to change sections so she could get away from us. We finally got her to come over to our table and I got the balls enough to ask her out, but she stone-cold turned me down. As a matter of fact, for six weeks straight I was eating steak at Jo-Jo's trying to get this beautiful girl to go out on a date with me, but I was getting nowhere fast. Finally, as a last resort, I gave her my number because she would never give me hers. I told her if she ever wanted to go out one night to give me a call. A few days later she finally gave me a chance, and I haven't let her out of my heart since. Her name is Kitty.

Our first date was kind of comical. Because of my life as a pro wrestler, dating was kind of new to me. Like I said before, we were out with a lot of women on the road, but we were just looking to party and have a good time. So on my way over to pick up Kitty, I was wondering, "What do you do on a first date?" So being the natural romantic that I am, we went to the park behind the school nearby and swung on the swings. While it was kind of nice, it was also a little odd. Not only was I not used to being in a park on a date, I had a .380 9mm automatic holstered under my jacket that she didn't know about, and I had smoked a joint on the way over, and then took some quaaludes so I could come down! What was this poor pretty girl getting herself into? Here was this sweet little Bambi swinging on the swing next to this big wolf in sheep's clothing.

But to be honest, I wouldn't change a thing. It all turned out perfect in the end because that relationship developed into a twenty-four-year marriage, and although Kitty's love of animals has cost me a fortune, it was worth it for the four beautiful children she's given me. From the first time we met, we both felt an intense familiarity, closeness, and ease with each other. I think that soul-mate comfort came into play here. But I was hot on my career, and Kitty's desires led her away to Walla Walla to be with the show-horse circuit she loved. Over the next two and a half years we kept in touch and dated whenever we were in the same town. I can honestly say that I've never met a greater lady than Kitty. With all the shit I put her through over the years, never once has she said she was leaving me, and believe me, as we go along here you'll see if anybody ever had a reason to leave anybody, it was her! I'm not the easiest guy to be married to. But even through all our problems, she's been right there for me, and that's why I'll always have a special place in my heart for Jo-Jo's and Kitty.

Around this time I also started using catchphrases in my segments. I started saying things like: "Every time you think you've got all the answers, I change the questions." Or another famous one: "I came here to chew bubble gum and kick ass, and I'm all out of bubble gum." These, like so many other things I did as a wrestler, would be duplicated but never equaled. Everywhere I went, people would know these sayings by heart and scream them to me, whether I was wrestling in their home arena or waiting in line to buy a six-pack of Heineken. Another reason people began screaming at me in Portland was that I started hanging around with a wrestler named Rick Martel. He is the brother of a guy I had wrestled ten years earlier who had died, Michel Martel. Rick ended up becoming one of my best friends. He is not only an amazing wrestler, he is also a truly amazing man. The fact that he looked like Sylvester Stallone didn't hurt either, as we had girls by the dozens whenever I was with Rick. Because of his looks, Martel had so many options other than wrestling—there was Hollywood, where he almost became Stallone's double in a couple of movies—and there were always modeling agencies knocking on his door. But for some reason, he chose to stay with wrestling and selfishly I was glad because I loved the time we spent together. I can honestly say we shared many laughs over the years. I especially loved when he had to do interviews. You have to understand, Rick was a great wrestler, but interviews were not his forte. His French accent killed whatever he was trying to say. Between the girls screaming for him and that terrible accent, you never knew what was being said.

One of the things I would do during my interviews was read one of my fan letters on the air. It would always say something like, "Dear Roddy, I watch you wrestle all the time and I think you're the greatest wrestler in the world. I love you and I hope to see you soon. Please kick Buddy Rose's ass. I'll love you forever. Love, Beverly. P.S.: Can you get me a date with Rick Martel?" And then I'd crumple the letter and I'd throw it down and pretend to be mad, bolting from the Crow's Nest, saying that I was going to find Martel.

When I'd find him, I'd take my frustration out on him by yelling at him, telling him about all his love letters that I was getting and that I was sick of them. This type of banter went back and forth between us for some time. Rick became another extraordinary tag partner of mine. We did everything together both inside and outside of the ring.

One story I'll never forget happened when we were in Washington during the eruption of Mount St. Helens. Rick had just gotten a brand-new black Firebird that he had shipped over from Hawaii when he was wrestling there. I remember the day I went with him to pick it up. We had to travel two hundred miles, and when we finally get there, he's like a kid on Christmas morning. We get in the shiny vehicle and one of the first things he does is open up the sunroof. He then takes the beautiful piece of machinery on the highway and puts the pedal to the metal and we start joyriding at 100 mph, both of us enjoying every second of the rush. About two weeks later, we again hit the road, but this time it was for business. We jumped in the black beauty with our wrestling gear on a gorgeous sunny day in Portland, ready to make the trek to Tacoma, Washington, for a match. Neither of us had a care in the world on this day. We had the radio going, sunroof down, sunglasses on, as we were speeding down the highway toward Washington. But our fun in the sun would soon come to an end. As we're driving, the whole road becomes covered with this grayish substance and then we see the entire sky go gray on us. The next thing I know there's this loud boom and we slide head-on into a tractor trailer that jackknifes in front of us. The impact of the crash was so hard that the door handle I was holding on to for dear life ripped off right in my hand. We then realized that Mount St. Helens had erupted and the truck had stopped out of panic. A car containing an old couple had also crashed into the truck. The entire place was now covered with ash, and it looked like we just had a snowstorm. You could hardly see your hand in front of your face. We knew that there were going to be cars coming behind us, so we both tried to get out of the car, but weren't having any luck. I tried to kick my door open, but it was jammed shut because the frame of the car had been bent. Then Rick, as calm as 007, taps me on the shoulder and says, "Monsieur, the sunroof is down, we just need to climb up through the sunroof." So we climbed out to safety—at least I thought we were going to be safe! No sooner had we gotten out of the smashed car than Rick and I were busy saving lives. Me, being the honorable man that I was, was busy saving my own life, as I had to jump onto a cement highway divider in order to dodge an out-of-control car that was coming right at me while Rick was trying to help out the elderly couple who had been hurt. Bless his heart. Maybe that's why he got more fan mail than me.

The police finally arrived on the scene. They got there almost as the crashing stopped and started passing out masks, much like you would see a doctor wear during surgery. Just as I noticed that there were highway patrolmen all over the place, I realized that I had left my Haliburton in the car. I told Rick about my dilemma and he told me to go get it before the cops took the smashed car away from the scene. As I went back to the car, Rick was giving out his insurance information to the cops so he could get reimbursed for his totaled car. After I retrieved my case, I went over to Rick and asked the cops to hurry up the paper-filling-out process, as we still had a match to get to. I'd be damned if I was going to let a volcano eruption make me miss a match. When he was done, Martel turned around to get one last look at his dream car and he looked so sad—like the commercial with the Indian holding on to his heart as somebody goes by and litters, and a tear falls out of his eye. The next thing I know we had our thumbs out, and a semi picked us up and we got into Tacoma an hour late. I must admit the ride wasn't the most pleasant, as I sat between Rick and the driver with the gearshift up my ass, but we made it to the match. When we got to the arena, we were greeted by Dutch Savage, the territory's promoter, who was so concerned about our well-being that he said, "Where the fuck have you two been? You're always late. You've got no damn respect." Rick and I just looked at each other and went inside to get changed for our match. We wrestled and got a ride home some other way. Even Mother Nature couldn't keep me from wrestling in the ring.

We were now selling out places like Vancouver, British Columbia, and the promoters had to go to bigger buildings in order to accommodate all the fans. This had never happened before. The wrestling business was really starting to pick up in North America. But with this success came cockiness. We felt as though we were above the law and that the laws of society didn't apply to us. We felt that as long as we weren't hurting anybody else, we did what we had to do to get to the next town to entertain the fans and make our next dollar. We never knew, it might be our last dollar or our last match.

But even though I was wrestling in front of these huge crowds and having success like never before, I wasn't always "Hot Rod." Every night wasn't the perfect wrestling night for me. I had my share of embarrassing moments in the ring. One night in Vancouver, Rick and I were scheduled to wrestle in a cage match against another popular tag team, the Sheepherders (later to be known as the Bushwhackers), and I remember walking out into that arena and the energy in the building just got my blood pumping. It was a full house and the crowd was going crazy, and I remember walking down the aisle and seeing the cage for the first time, and for some strange reason I just tore ass toward it. Strangely enough, I started scaling the thirty-foot cage, making my way to the top. Now, you have to understand why this was so strange—not only did I have no idea what I was going to do when I got to the top, I also happen to be scared to death of heights! So what the fuck was I doing thirty-feet up in the air? And if you think I was crazy, Rick was right behind me. But once I got to the top and I put my foot over, the cage started wobbling. The last thing I saw was the Sheepherders looking up at me like, "What the fuck, is this guy nuts?" and then I lost my balance and I fell down on my back between the cage and the ropes. Once Rick saw me come crashing down, he gingerly started to make his way back down so he could enter the cage the normal way—through the door. Meanwhile, there I was lying under the bottom rope with my legs up like an old whore and my kilt over my face. I must've looked like Heidi Fleiss that night, but the Sheepherders weren't interested. They were content with the sheep that night. Me, I wanted to make it look like I had meant to do what I'd done, so I just jumped up after the fall looking to start the match.

Eventually, Rick and I decided to move in together. We got a place at the infamous Bomber Hotel. This was a place where most of the guys were staying and it became more like a frat house than our home. There would be all sorts of shenanigans going on at all times of the night at the Bomber.

We would come home and there would be girls there making food for us, sleeping in our beds, girls on the porch—anywhere you looked we had girls. Wrestling had reached the height of its popularity in Oregon and we were taking advantage of it. The tag team of Roddy Piper and Rick Martel was so hot in Portland that a local appliance-store owner named Tom Peterson asked us to make an appearance. Four thousand people showed up at this store on a hot and muggy day, and there were just three tables set up against a wall in the back. After a couple of hours of this madness, we were hot and sweaty and told Mr. Peterson that we needed a break. The store owner didn't even offer us anything cold to drink, so when we were in the back of the warehouse we decided that we'd exit through the back door, leaving Peterson to deal with the angry crowd and our promoter.

The industry was becoming so big so fast that even the promoters didn't know what to do. Wrestling had never had this type of attention before, so they were learning on the fly just like us how to deal with it. We now were at the point where we could fill the PR Center in Portland on a regular basis. One of the best draws was always me against Buddy Rose. We built up our rivalry to the point where people couldn't get enough. The rivalry got so intense at one point that Buddy put his prize possession, his yellow Lincoln Mark IV, on the line. The car was even brought into the building for all the fans to see. We also gave the fans an extra-special treat for the bout and decided that it was going to be a cage match. This match was an unbelievable show that lasted for forty long minutes. In the end I came out of the cage not only the winner, but also the proud new owner of a Mark IV. The best part of winning this match was not getting the car or beating Buddy, it was the reaction of the fans when they saw me driving the yellow Lincoln—soon to be known as the Yellow Canary. They would all scratch their heads and wonder: "Wow. Maybe wrestling really is real?"

Within the next three months the fans in Portland all knew that I had really taken Buddy Rose's car away from him. The title was transferred to me and everything, so the line between reality and fiction was very fuzzy. This was exactly what I had played on to draw money. But Buddy would have the last laugh. We had two matches called Loser Leaves Town, where the loser had to literally pack up and leave the territory. Back in those days, there was one rule to follow in a Loser Leaves Town match: never pack your stuff in advance because if you did, there was a possibility that you'd tip off the fans, and then why would they bother to come?

We didn't want to be like the wrestler who, years earlier, had tipped and ticked off the fans when he was scheduled to take part in a Loser Leaves Town match and he showed up at the arena driving a U-Haul that was packed with all his belongings. The wrestler had the intention of wrestling in the match and hitting the highway right after. Well, on this night he got an early start because no one stayed to see his match.

Not Buddy and me. We were ready to give the fans their money's worth.

Our match sold out in record time and Buddy and I decided that we could milk the fans for another Loser Leaves Town match on another night, so we decided to go the full sixty-minute time limit in front of the capacity crowd and end the contest in a draw. The only catch was that we had to find a way to make the audience believe that we were going all out for the win. In this case, our plan was very simple but very effective. You have the good guy (me) and the bad guy (Buddy) battle even almost the entire match, and then at one point both wrestlers get knocked out when the referee does the ten-count at the forty-five-minute mark and the bell rings. The fans now went crazy thinking that there was a double count-out and nobody was going to have to leave town. Just as the fans were ready to riot because they felt like they were ripped off, the ref ordered two pails of water and screamed, "The match will continue!" He took a bucket and dumped one on me and one on Buddy and we both came to. We were now ready to go again and the fans went wild!

The first thing I did was to take a bite out of Buddy, which made him bleed profusely. I followed that up with a series of pin combinations that Rose just made it out of. The fans were now totally back into the match, thinking at any second that I was going to beat Rose, but at the fifty-five minute mark, the psychology came into play. With Buddy lying prone on the ring floor, I climbed up on the ropes and flew off in his direction looking to land a knee drop. But I missed and he rolled over and immediately went to work on my "hurt" leg, trying to make me give up. As this is going on, the ref is letting the crowd know how much time is left in the match. The fans now start thinking: "Roddy, don't give up, you've only got a few minutes left!" But I'm still screaming from the "pain" that Buddy was inflicting on my leg. Just as I'm about to utter "I quit," the bell rings, ending the match in a draw. The fans all jump from their seats screaming and clapping, thankful that I didn't give up!

They hadn't gotten closure for what they paid to see. So a rematch was immediately announced for the next week, which was another sellout. This time I got pummeled, pulverized and pinned by the town heel. I was leaving the promotion back in Buddy Rose's hands. I was now headed to North Carolina to take on new challenges and challengers. I was thankful for the opportunity Buddy had given me to better my career and was grateful for the Yellow Canary, which could do 110 mph all day long and never chirp.

5

The Charlotte Years

So now my Portland years are behind me and I'm off to North Carolina, where East is about to meet West. If you remember, at one time I was the talk of the entire West Coast and Ric Flair was the talk of the East. But now the two of us were going to be playing for the same team. There was no longer going to be miles of road and different time zones separating us. Flair and I were going to be wrestling on the same circuit and we were about to go head-to-head. Would there be enough room on the same card for two young pioneers with big egos? I was about to find out.

I had been in contact with a wrestling buddy of mine, Ray Stevens, who I had wrestled with on the San Francisco beat, and he put me in touch with his booker in Charlotte, George Scott. After hearing how well I did in Oregon, Scott invited me to come to North Carolina to give the East Coast a try. So I packed up the Yellow Canary and hit the road.

On the way, I stopped at a place called the Silver Dollar Saloon—I think it was in Montana. I checked into the hotel and headed straight for the bar. The saloon had silver dollars everywhere—they were laminated on the bar, on the walls, all over the place. There were a few guys in the bar and we got to talking. They mentioned that they played football with Wahoo McDaniels. I had met Wahoo years back when I was in the AWA. So we were talking and drinking. Actually, we got to drinking pretty hard and I don't remember much from that night, but I do recall that someone brought up the age-old question: Is wrestling real or is it phony? I also recollect a bit of a fight taking place, but I couldn't tell you much else because the next thing I remember is waking up in my room. I was lying on top of the bedspread with all my clothes on. My watch, my money, and my wallet were on the bedside table. I looked around and noticed that the door was ripped off the hinges and there was a cowboy hat in the middle of the floor. I don't know what happened, but I do know one thing: there are times when one must decide to "fight or flee" and this was where flee came in. I jumped out of my bed over the cowboy hat, grabbed my belongings and hopped into my car, and took off.

I drove through Oklahoma, and when I got tired again, I stopped in some small town—I don't remember the name of it. Of course the first thing I did was hit the local bar. The next thing I know, I'm again in a fight. Some guy pulled a knife and the police showed up. Like I said, this was a local dive, so who was the only guy the cops didn't know? That's right, me. So they kicked me out and I got back in the Yellow Canary and away I went again.

Finally, I arrived in North Carolina, and I checked into the Tuckasegee Days Inn. While the place was a step above the Bomber Hotel, the craziness I experienced in Portland was nothing compared with what I was about to embark on. Most of the wrestlers who were working the circuit were living at the Days Inn, and over the course of time we developed a camaraderie that was second to none in pro sports. We were more than coworkers or a fraternity—we really were like blood brothers. Sure, don't get me wrong, we had our fun and games, but we also had one another's back in times of trouble. We looked out for one another's safety not only on the mat, but also when we were traveling in the States or abroad.

Some of the awesome talent that was wrestling in the NWA, which was run by Jimmy Crockett (yes, he was related to Davey), was Ray Stevens, Jimmy Snuka, Ricky Steamboat, Ric Flair, Dory Funk, Jack Mulligan, Jack and Jerry Brisco, Dusty Rhodes, Harley Race, Andre the Giant, and Gene and Ole Anderson.

As you can tell by the names, this was a place where the Big Boys in the business were performing. Each and every one of these guys was an established star, so there was no way Crockett could go wrong in whatever card he put together. He knew he was going to give the audience their money's worth every night and we knew we were going to be paid well for our performances. But just because we all were good at what we did and were earning a decent living didn't make our schedules any easier. As a matter of fact, the better we did, the higher the demand was for us.

There was still the long two- to three-hundred-mile trips each way and the long six- to seven-night workweek. So we made the most out of the time we spent together. We tried to have fun both inside the ring and out. But what may have looked like fun to others was really just a way for us to keep our sanity. If all the wear and tear between the ropes and the drugs and alcohol didn't kill us the night before, we had to get up and go to the gym and try to sweat off whatever we did the previous evening. But in order to get the energy to hit the weights the next morning, each of us had his own poison to take in order to get him going.

After hitting the weights, we'd take to the road again. But believe it or not, there was a method to our driving madness. Besides our ring gear, we also had on hand in the car the wrestling "survival" kit. This included some Neosporin to fight infection just in case we got a cut, some Ting for crotch rot, an antibiotic just in case we got sick, some beer in case we got wired, some sleeping pills in case we couldn't sleep, and a pistol in case we needed protection.

We would then get into town and pound on one another's body for a couple of hours, and when the event was over, we went out in search of a nightspot that had good food, better booze, and "bad" women. The key to not feeling any pain after matches was to drink as much alcohol and take as many downers as humanly possible to try to make you forget you were living in a time capsule. This socializing after matches also gave us a chance to think up new strategies for drawing a big house again the next night.

Tuesdays were always the roughest days out east. No matter where we were wrestling the night before, we had to be in the TV studio the next morning at 10 A.M. so we could cut our promos and do our interviews for the upcoming matches. Nobody was exempt from this chore. It made for a very long day and night because we had to cut about ninety two-minute-and-fifty-four-second interviews and then head out to Raleigh for the night's matches. This would have been a tough schedule for any sober businessman or athlete, but try to keep on doing it after taking a pounding in the ring and at the bar the night before . . . it sure as hell wasn't easy.

Even though I thought I knew the ropes, I wound up learning a thing or two in the studio on those miserable Tuesdays. After winning my first belt, the Mid-Atlantic TV title, from a veteran grappler named Paul Jones on November 1, 1980, I ragged on him about his age in an interview. I said something like: "Yeah, Paul Jones, you're so old that every time you go by a cemetery two guys chase you with a shovel." Well, maybe the joke was funny, but in thirty thousand words or more Jones explained to me why calling him old would not draw any money. He pointed out that I had to be more careful with how far I went with my material because the more trash I talked about a wrestler, the worse I'd make him look. So if I went into the ring and knocked my opponent from here to eternity, who did I really beat? What did I prove by beating up this so-called loser, or old man in Paul's case? I now learned that the more I built up my foe, the more impressive my win would be in the eyes of the fans.

My next big win in Charlotte came over a wrestler who used to always say, "If you want to *be* the man, you've got to *beat* the man!" and that man was none other than Ric Flair. George Scott decided to put me up against his top draw for the United States Heavyweight Championship a little over two months after I won my first belt. And I have to admit, it wasn't easy. It wasn't give-and-take like people think. Flair had a reputation in Charlotte and did not want to lose his championship strap. Even though we all knew it was a business, egos and pride were still involved.

Interview Tuesdays were really paying off big-time. I did what I wanted to do in front of the camera, but always had the good of the promotion in mind. I was way ahead of my time with what I was doing with interviews. I did the very first vignette interview with music and a production. I was in a dog-collar match with Buzz Sawyer in Atlanta. For the interview, I brought in a red pickup truck and tied my dog Feather, a miniature pinscher, to the back. I climbed up onto a table with my hands tied behind my back, a hood over my head, and a noose around my neck. All the while the song "Bad to the Bone" was playing. I wanted to show everyone how tough I was, so I hanged myself by the dog collar. They just pulled the table out from under me and I hung for a while, then they put me back on the table and I picked up the puny mutt and said, "Sawyer, you're no mad dog; you're just a miniature pinscher." It was a very hip interview. They made a tape of it and passed it around the office so everyone could watch it. Nothing like this had ever been done before. Like I said, I was ahead of my time.

But when I found out I was going to go head-to-head with Charlotte's hometown favorite, Flair, I decided to spice things up a bit. We were scheduled to square off in January of 1981 for the championship belt, so with the holidays still in the air, I decided to give my opponent a present in the ring that night in front of all his fans. I wrapped up the Mid-Atlantic Championship belt in Christmas paper and went on TV with Flair and gave him the generous gift. When he opened it, I informed him and the audience that I was relinquishing my title to him in order to go after his U.S. Heavyweight Championship. This got a lot of heat. Ric had had no idea I was going to come out and do this, but he was a pro and it worked out great. I found out that the element of surprise, as long as it's in the right context, worked out really well, getting an honest reaction. Sometimes it backfired in my face, but not on this night. I went on to win the heavyweight belt from Flair that evening and held on to the title for over six months, which was a rarity in those days when the titles seemed to change hands almost every week.

Although Flair didn't like losing to me—what professional athlete likes losing?—he didn't let it come between us outside the arena, and we quickly became close friends. I really posed no threat to him or his career. Even though we did the same thing for a living, we were both entertainers and two very different people. Ric Flair wore a robe, I wore a kilt. Ric Flair dyed his hair blond, I didn't. I played the bagpipes, Ric Flair didn't. We were cut from completely different molds. Therefore we were never really at each other's throat (unlike Hogan and me). Ric also had a huge nose, I didn't.

I also have to admit that Ric Flair got me into more trouble than I care to remember. But he always made me laugh. I think I went through three lives in the time I spent with that man and I honestly wouldn't change a thing or trade a memory for anything in the world. Despite all the trouble he got me into, I love him deeply.

Speaking of someone I adore deeply, Kitty, the love of my life, was at this time still working the show-horse circuit and I had located her whereabouts in Wilsonville, Oregon. Now that I had established myself and was having some success in Charlotte, I begged her to come live with me. My girl then sold everything, including her beloved horse, and came to North Carolina with her cat and dalmation, Ryiethumnne R., to be with her man. It would have been nice if her man was there to greet her when she arrived, but my baby had no such luck. I had sent her the plane ticket, but on the day she arrived I forgot to pick her up at the airport and she waited there for me for six hours. That right there should show you how great and devoted this woman is. When I realized what I had done, I apologized and promised I would never let her down like that again. Kitty and I became an instant item, soon to become three items!

I was now living large. With my girl now by my side and a championship belt around my waist, I couldn't have been more happy. My victory over Flair again established me as a bankable star—this time on the East Coast. This was now the fourth territory that I was selling out. Promoters again realized that I was definitely not a flash in the pan, and was someone to be reckoned with. I was wrestling and living with a fear-nothing attitude, and got by on the one basic rule of "no retreat, no surrender." As Terry Funk put it, "I was building the legend." The "Sickness" was so consuming at this point that nothing else mattered.

The shot George Scott was kind enough to give me paid off and I was one of the territory's top draws. Wrestlers on the circuit were not only losing titles to me, they were also following my lead. A short time later I would part ways with Scott. This was through no fault of his. He was a good man; I just saw a better opportunity with Ole Anderson as my booker, and I took it. Ole was great for me because he helped me learn some of the complexities of the business that I was unfamiliar with. Yes, I had sold out other arenas, but there was an incredible amount of up-and-coming young talent in America and Canada and I needed to know the ins and outs of the biz in order to stay on top.

The in-ring feud between Flair and me really ignited a fire in the wrestling industry, so I wanted to learn everything I could in order to keep the flame lit. Having the luxury of working alongside greats like Dusty Rhodes, Andre the Giant, Dory Funk, Terry Funk, Jack Brisco, Jerry Brisco, and countless others taught me a lot. I learned from Jerry Brisco how to keep going even when there was a tough act to follow. Jerry had the unfortunate pleasure of following his big brother Jack Brisco in the territory after he was a champion. I once asked Jerry how he did it and he said, "Just a little have-to, Pipes, just a little have-to." In other words, he had no other choice if he wanted to work in the business. This was another lesson I had to learn before I got my wrestling degree.

Ole Anderson also taught me the lesson of drawing money. At this time I had been in Charlotte for about seven or eight months, and the intensity that I created with some of my interview techniques drew big crowds to our shows. But one night Ole pointed out to me how things could be much better. We were in Richmond, Virginia, for a card and I was wrestling Flair. I remember it like it was yesterday. The place was packed to the rafters and Ric and I went at it real good for about twenty-five minutes and wrestled what we thought was a solid performance. After the match, people were coming up to us and complimenting our effort. But not Ole. I knew I had nicknamed this guy Pig Face for a reason. He was a very good wrestler, but he was a bully. Plus, I knew he had a glass jaw, but that was beside the point. Ole had a great psychology for drawing money, and he told me that the match that night sucked. I called him on his statement and asked him how he could say that when the people were screaming their heads off throughout the match and all the guys were coming up to Ric and me telling us how good we were. He said we looked like two Mexicans out there. Mexican wrestlers are known for their high-flying quick style, so that's why he said that—at least that's what I think he meant. Anyway, the fact of the matter is, he said, that I was flying out there like a lily, just flipping and flopping around like a fish out of water, not really doing anything worthwhile. He said that sure, the people were happy, but what reason did we give them to come back? Ole asked me: "If you were going to have a street fight and you looked at somebody and they jumped on the hood of their car and did a back flip, would that make your day?" I said, "Yeah, I'd spike 'em into the ground." He said, "Well then, why the hell were you doing that shit off the ropes?"

Anderson gave me a half-hour speech about planting my feet on the ground and being a real fighter, and about making those people respect you for the battler that you are. And you know something?

Pig Face was right. As soon as I stopped the flipping and flopping and planted my feet on the ground, I started to draw even more money. This minor adjustment allowed Ole Anderson and me to see firsthand how Roddy Piper could draw huge crowds and make millions and millions of dollars for a promotion.

But while my wrestling performance improved on the mat, my time on the mike was also a big part of my success. The interviews I did with the legendary Dusty Rhodes on Tuesdays in the studio helped turn me into an all-around performer. Interview day would begin and they would call your name and you'd get up off of the bleachers and go in front of the camera. The interview clock would be set at 2:54, and once the time started rolling, so did I.

One Tuesday, all these great wrestlers, including Dusty, were standing around in the room waiting for their turn. Dusty Rhodes was probably the king of the promos at the time and I happened to be wrestling him that particular week. I would cut a promo, then he would cut a promo. I would say things like "a big and great man like Dusty Rhodes—look at the pecs on him. It looks like he had six litters of puppies." He would then come back with something on me. I would go back to him with, "Whenever he goes swimming someone tries to harpoon him." We just went toe-to-toe without giving the other a chance to think or breathe in fear of not being able to keep up with the verbal jabs. After a while I noticed that the whole world seemed to stop in the room, as Flair and all the other wrestlers were now watching our war of words like it was a championship match. That day really put me on the map in terms of being able to keep up with one of the masters on the mike, and it gave me some more confidence and dignity among my Frat Brothers.

These great men really knew how to teach the ropes and they also knew how to shell out praise just as much as punishment. Not too long after that day with Rhodes, Jimmy Crockett called everyone together. I had once again gone word for word with Dusty and was simply just trying to catch my next breath when he called us in. He said that he had an award to give out, and he asked me to come up to the front to accept it. I never had this happen to me before or after this. It was an award from *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* for the hardest-working wrestler voted by his peers.

I was numb after I heard the announcement. I walked up to the front of the room to Crockett, and all of the wrestlers, including my old friend Lord Alfred Hayes, were clapping for me. I graciously took the award from Jim, but walked away without uttering a word. I was taught by Lord Alfred Hayes to always keep your composure.

I really couldn't believe I was being presented this award, especially in this very competitive dressing room. The other guys worked just as hard as I did, and if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have been there. We were all part of a team. As much as we were cutthroat to one another at times, you never said something bad about any of our guys, otherwise you'd have a handful of monsters ready to kick the daylights out of you. But the truth of the matter is that we were a group that was willing to die for one another if the situation arose.

I don't mean any disrespect, but this type of camaraderie doesn't exist in today's world of pro wrestling, or in any sport, for that matter. A lot of people today think wrestling began when the WWF began, but there were so many great men before the WWF. All these talented guys had all this knowledge that they passed on to us, and they took care of us like we were their own. That just isn't done today.

Also at this time in my career, I stopped playing the bagpipes. But the reason I stopped had nothing to do with advice from any of my peers; it had all to do with my health. Before I put the pipes away for good, I would walk down the aisle with the blow stick in my mouth, and the fans would hit the pipes, driving the blow stick into my teeth and gums. I would be bleeding even before I got into the ring. This got old fast for me, and made eating a very painful affair! I also didn't need a warm-up for me and the crowd anymore. I was now in tune with the audience. As soon as I made my way from behind the curtain, I could tell you what the people were thinking. I could tell you as I was walking up the aisles in the arenas if I should start fast or I should start slow. I had learned to control the crowd and not let them control me. Over the years you learn to walk into the ring slow so you can get that feel.

But while this style let you get a sense of the night's audience, it also served another purpose. We used to get paid a percentage of the house. Wrestlers would get blackballed if they were caught with a clicker, counting how many people were at the event. So over time you learned to count the house as you walked into the ring. One time a P gave me a count on the house. I had been in this building a few other times and learned what a sellout was, so I could count that venue by sight without a clicker and I would usually be within $5,000. Well, I knew that this promoter was cheating me and my fellow wrestlers, so I asked him what the house was. He didn't really want to answer the question, but all the other wrestlers were looking at me and him from the dressing room. So the snake tells me the house is $15,000. Well, I knew for a fact it was double that. The other guys were looking at me and the promoter, waiting for a confrontation, but instead there was dead silence. All the other wrestlers were bowing their heads because they were wondering, "Now what are we going to do?" Most of these guys were afraid to call the P on anything. They felt that the promoter had complete power. Well, I was taught different.

As a rebel, I was taught that your power was your talent and that you shouldn't be afraid to quit, because your abilities would land you another job. I wasn't afraid to start over again. I wasn't afraid to move. I wasn't afraid of the P or anybody else. I was trying to point out to my coworkers the tyranny that was taking place here. I took off my kilt and trunks and put my street clothes back on just as intermission was ending, and I walked through the crowd to the ring. I caused a stir in the arena because I wasn't in my ring attire; I was just carrying my Halliburton—no Rolex at this time—and sporting my tennis shoes—no alligator boots just yet. I climbed through the ropes and into ring, where I ripped the mike out of the announcer's hand. I then proceeded to tell the crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, the promoter won't pay me the money that he owes me to wrestle, so I'm going to leave the building and I'd advise you to get your money back, too." Then I laid the mike down and walked out the front door. From what my buddy Jay York told me, it was one of the best riots of the year!

I'm a pretty tough customer all the way around, especially when I think I'm being taken for a fool. I'm not afraid to say no, and I'm not afraid of man or beast. I think my wrestling that bear early in my career and standing toe-to-toe—if you want to call it that—with Andre the Giant proved that! You know, after you have all 550 pounds of Andre the Giant come down on your chest several times in your life, what more is there to fear? I know there is a God—experiences such as these made me see Him several times over! (As far as religion is concerned, I've always been a Christian. Throughout my life and career, I've always seen those bumper stickers that say, I'VE FOUND HIM. Well, to be quite honest, I've never lost Him. I've never been a Bible-thumper, but I think the fact that I'm a Christian has probably saved a lot of people's lives—including my own. During some of my dark times, it's helped me prevail in life and try not to hurt anyone.)

One promoter who always seemed like he was out to hurt all the wrestlers was this man in Atlanta by the name of Jim Barnett. He was one of those Ps who had power and fear working for him against all his wrestlers. They all catered to this guy for some reason and I never understood why. I was introduced to Jim by Ole Anderson during one of my many Tuesday interview sessions. And the first time I saw this guy I knew there was something strange about him; he said to me (in his Southern accent), "Oh my boy, what a lovely smile." He was a weird fellow who used to sit there in his three-piece suit and sniff his tie. Jim was good friends with a lot of the Georgia Bulldog players and you knew right away which ones he was familiar with because they all had Rolexes. Barnett was nuts about these players in more ways than one.

Ole had been talking me up to this Southern promoter for quite some time, telling him how well I had done in the industry, and the two men dreamed of putting together the best promotion in the entire world and were relying on Flair and me to carry them there.

At about the same time Flair had taken me to this place called Franco's in Richmond, Virginia, and had me buy all these suits and these expensive camel-hair jackets. He wanted me to make a good impression on Barnett, but dressing me up in clothes from Franco's was like putting perfume on a pig! Well, neither my clothes nor mike skills impressed Barnett the first time around and he would have fired me if Ole hadn't convinced him to give me a second chance.

The Atlanta promoter had put me on with Gordon Solie, a wonderful announcer, and when my first night on the job was over, Jim called Ole and blasted my work. He told Ole over the phone, "I thought you said he could talk. Fire him—he's terrible." But Anderson stuck up for me. He told Jim that I had bought a new suit jacket for this gig and asked him to give me another shot. Barnett agreed. When I got there next Saturday, the ratings had gone up one and a half points, so now Jim changed his tune; he was all sweetness, saying, "Oh my boy, how are you? Oh, you must come up to my office and see me sometime." Ole just smiled at him and said, "I told you so . . ." So now I was working two territories at the same time—Charlotte and Atlanta. I had to be insane to agree to do this, but the Sickness fueled my fire.

But I still hadn't completely won Barnett over. The next test he threw at me came in the form of a wrestler named Bob Armstrong. The grappler, who was also a fireman by trade, knew Barnett was out to get me, so he decided to help me out. Before the interview that would be going out live on TBS on *Championship Wrestling*, Bob came over to talk to me very quietly. He told me to say on the air that he had skinny legs. This normally would have been a no-no because remember you never go after your opponent's weaknesses (remember the time I knocked Paul Jones in an interview about being old?), but Bob was going above and beyond the call of duty for me here. So I'm doing the live interview with him before the fight and I'm being pretty damn obnoxious, which I'm good at (as my wife says, when I want to, I'm the best asshole in the world) and I used the ammunition Bob gave me beforehand, saying something like: "How do you expect to beat me with skinny legs like that?" In return, Bob said, "Did you ever see big legs on a racehorse?" He turned to walk away, but I saw that I had ten seconds left in our interview, and so I really went on the attack. This is when I started to become pretty good at improvising. I waited until Bob was a few feet away from me, and one of the things I said to him was: "Well, if I'm ever at a horse race, I'll be sure to bet on you." That line in itself got the fans in The Omni going wild, and we went from averaging $20,000 to $60,000 overnight.

I was now a smash success in wrestling in Atlanta and Jim Barnett was beaming. Ole Anderson was now pushing me harder than ever, and I was going as hard as I could in order to please the guys. So now I was wrestling Monday through Friday, once each day, and twice on Saturday and Sunday. Each event was a two- to three-hundred-mile drive away. When we started to do the double shots we got into taking private planes. I was also wrestling in a third territory—Canada. The schedule was crazy. Every night a referee would slip me a jar filled with an assortment of drugs like Placidyl, Tuinal, and Valium and other painkillers. We're talking a shitload of pills. They did this so they could keep pushing and pushing.

We worked hard on our wrestling and even harder to survive. I remember one night with Don Muraco. Don was an important influence on my life. He was a tremendous wrestler. I did a piece of business with him and Gordon Solie that I will never forget. It was a big telecast on Ted Turner's TBS network. Solie had just had a hip replacement and Muraco kind of brushed up against him, but it was kind of rough, and this started a "fight" between me and Muraco. The fight began in the studio and we brought it into the ring. There were a bunch of wrestlers trying to pull us apart, and it just got crazy. I feel it was one of the better "pull-aparts" in wrestling history.

A typical night with Don Muraco would consist of wrestling, driving home, and drinking pretty heavily. One night we were in the car and Muraco was doing 85 mph. The next thing I knew, we hit the Canadian border. I don't know how we got there, but we made great time!

Things get a little murky here. The next morning we woke up in this huge mansion. I didn't know where I was or how I got there. I looked around for Muraco, but he was nowhere to be found, so I yelled out for him. I heard him yell back to me in the distance, and we kept yelling, following the sounds of our voices, until we found each other. He didn't know where we were either, so we thought it best if we just hightailed it out of there. We got into our car, stopped at a gas station, and asked for directions to the nearest airport. The car was a rental, and we just left it at the entrance to the airport and bought tickets to the town where we had to wrestle that night. I remember waiting at the gate to board the plane and hearing an announcement asking the owner of the Hertz rental car that was abandoned at the front door to claim it. We ignored it and got on the plane. We never heard another thing about the car.

I've gotten away with a lot of shit in my life. They say God takes care of fools and babies! This one time we were driving back from Canada to the United States and we had just reached the border. René Goulet was at the driver, Nikolai Volkoff was in the front passenger seat, and me and the Iron Sheik were sitting in the back. What you need to understand at this point is that I was the only illegal alien in the car!

So the border guard comes up to the car and asks to see our ID. René says, "My name is René Goulet and I am from Quebec. I have been coming over here for years and do not need ID. I never have."

The guard asks Nikolai if he has any papers and he says, "My name is Nikolai Volkoff, and I am from the Ukraine. I do not have any papers. I do not need any papers. My papers are in the White House with the president."

So now the guard gets to the Iron Sheik, whose real name is Cosmo Husary. He had been an amateur wrestling champion in Iran and a bodyguard for the shah of Iran. The guard looks at the Sheik and raises an eyebrow. You see, this was at the time when those Americans were being held hostage in Iran. The Sheik says, "My name is Cosmos Husary, the Iron Sheik, the two-time World Champion. I come from Tehran, Iran. I do not need papers."

That's it. The guy makes us all get out of the car. He never even got to me. He orders René to open the trunk, and Nikolai Volkoff says under his breath, "This is just like the gestapo." The guy whirled around and said, "What did you say?" And the next thing I know, we're all in this cement room in the immigration office. Oh, what I failed to tell you is that I had a quarter ounce of hash on me. I quickly put it in my lip, because in Charlotte everyone chewed tobacco. We were in this room for about a half hour, and that hash started kicking in and I'm trying to hold it together. The guard comes back in; he had called Washington to verify these guys' papers. Finally, he gets to me and asks me, "What's your name?"

I said, "My name is Roderick George Toombs."

"Where'd you go to school?"

"St. Mary's," I said.

He turns around and says, "That's the only one I believe!" But since everybody's papers checked out, he had no choice but to let all of us go.

But I wasn't always so lucky. Another tangle with the law happened in Charlotte. I like to refer to this story as "The 2001 Space Odyssey Cadillac Demolition Derby." Everyone was driving brand-new Cadillacs. I had a brand-new Cadillac, Flair had a brand-new Cadillac, the Briscos had a brand-new Caddy, and Byron Scott—who was the son of George Scott, the man responsible for bringing me to Charlotte—had his father's new Cadillac.

Well, we had been in this club all night long, and Byron had been sucking us dry by milking drinks from all the wrestlers. For some reason, Byron and I got into an argument and he went outside and got into his father's car. I followed, and Byron, who had his driver's side window open about an inch, hollers, "My dad made you everything you are today." At which point my left fist went right through his windshield. Now, this kid decides maybe it's time he should move, so he started the car to take off. I rushed to my Cadillac and Jack Brisco limped to get into the passenger side. But Jack had a cast on his leg and didn't get in the car all the way before I hit the gas. Unbeknownst to me, my wheels were turned all the way to the left, so when I hit the gas, the Caddy shot hard to the left and flung Brisco out the door. I tried to grab him and caught ahold of his belt, but we both just went flying out onto the pavement. My car, however, continued moving and went straight toward Byron's car right in the middle of the driver's side. It was as if my car knew exactly where to go.

George Scott wound up taking me to court. He said, "Well, I am responsible for bringing Roddy in." And he was. He is a good man; this incident had nothing to do with George Scott. So I bowed down and paid the fine, and that was the end of it. Kitty, however, was none too happy about how our new Cadillac looked!

Another story that comes to mind is about a fellow named Art Barr. He is no longer with us. Art was a young, bighearted fellow who was full of talent. I had never trained anyone to be a professional wrestler—I mainly kept to myself—but this guy was worth a shot. I had an interview with him and I had some wrestlers hold a sheet in front of him and told him to strip down naked. I threw him some clothes and put baby powder in his hair. We removed the sheet and unveiled Beetlejuice. He was dancing to Harry Belafonte's song "Day-O" and the crowd loved it! Only Art Barr could have pulled that off!

He got to be a real big star in Mexico. I think he was making about $5,000 a week. He would call me for advice and I would treat him like a little brother. One time I was making a movie in Mexico City, and I met up with Art. I put him in one of the final scenes of the movie playing a waiter. After the shot, I took him up to my room and gave him a talk. I've only given three people this particular talk. I told him that he was going too hard and that if he didn't stop he was going to die. It was quite emotional, we were both crying, and I made him promise me that he was going to slow down and take care of himself.

About two months later I got a call from one of his relatives telling me there was big trouble. I was given a phone number to call and it turned out to be Art's mother's house. She told me that Art was dead, that he was lying there with his little son in his arms. He had just died. I don't believe they had even called an ambulance or the police yet. I told her she should probably call an ambulance, but she just said, "He's dead and it's your fault." Then she hung up. I guess they figured that I killed their son, that I had influenced him to live his life the way I lived mine. It makes you realize the power you have to influence others. It still breaks my heart to think of Art. I'm sorry he's gone. I loved him and I miss him. I wasn't even welcome at his funeral.

At this time I was hanging around with a man named "Wildfire" Tommy Rich. Tommy was Southern born and Southern bred. He was a fine guy and a talented wrestler and we got along great. Wrestling was starting to swirl, and it was because of national TV and people like Tommy Rich, Dusty Rhodes, Ric Flair, and the Four Horsemen, just to mention a few.

Tommy Rich was just a good ol' boy. He had a very unique outlook on life. He was really trying to get into shape and guys were telling him that he had to go to the gym and watch his diet. So one day we're at a restaurant and Tommy orders tuna fish and we said, "Tommy, that's great, but you also have to go to the gym."

He says, "Damn man, I'm eatin' tuna fish! I can't do everything!" He then proceeded to guzzle more beers than I would care to count.

We were traveling in West Virginia, where it was lawless. We were going into places where no one else had ever been, but that could be watched on TBS Super Station. One night we were driving along on this eight-lane freeway, and Tommy's cousin says we have to stop the car because he has to pee. Well, we had a cardinal rule that we just didn't stop to take a piss; we'd been abiding by this rule for years. But Tommy's cousin was whining, so I finally pulled over and he jumped out of the car to pee. No sooner did he get out than I just took off and left him out there in the middle of nowhere. I drove about three minutes, but Tommy wanted me to go back and get his cousin. Now, there was this cement divider in the middle of this freeway and no way to get over to the other side and go the other way without driving to the next exit. So I just turned around; I did a one-eighty, put the lights on high beam, honked the horn, and drove 80 mph straight toward oncoming traffic. We never did find the kid; it took him about a day to get home! Poor bastard.

I got into crazy shit with Tommy all the time. Tommy had this speedboat. One time we had been up all night and we had the bright idea to get a paddleboat for our wives. Kitty was pregnant with our first child at the time and we didn't think it would be a good idea for the wives to be in the speedboat; they might get sick from all the waves. So Kitty and Tommy's wife were in the paddleboat and Tommy and I could whip through in the speedboat. We took the boats to the beach, and at about 10 A.M., we were starting to run out of beer, so Tommy said, "I'll go get it." He jumped up and ran like Carl Lewis from the towel to the boat. He hit the throttle as hard as you could, and that boat went right up . . . and right into a log sticking out of the water. That boat sank just like the Minnow, man! By that time, if only for the benefit of our wives, we decided to go home.

Yeah, we were always getting into trouble, but I've always had a guardian angel—how else could I have survived half of the shit I've been through? I've been in quite a few car wrecks. We were always running those highways fast, and a lot of different substances were running through our systems. There was one crash in particular that shook me up, but it didn't stop me. I was in a car in Tennessee with Tommy Rich, Nick Patrick, who was a referee, and Brad Armstrong. I was driving and had been behind the wheel for a while, and I was banging back a few. I was doing about 100 mph, and up ahead the road curves and I see this bridge, and I know I'm just not going to make the turn. But I don't panic under fire. I manage to straighten the car out, but we go off the road into this embankment. By the grace of God, the Lincoln nose-dived in such a way as to just flop us over the embankment. Another five feet and we would have dropped twenty-five feet into the river!

We got out of the car and climbed up the embankment and there was this old Tennessee house; it looked like it came straight out of the movie *Deliverance*. And sitting on the porch in a rocking chair was this old guy with a long beard and a corncob pipe, and he's just rocking and watching us. Finally, he takes his pipe out of his mouth and says in a thick Southern drawl, "I knew you weren't going to make that turn."

The old guy actually helped us tow the Lincoln out of the ditch and we were off again. When we returned the car to Hertz, we just parked it way in the back and got out of the place quickly. But the truth is, after incidents like this, I am the reason why the Hertz office in Newark Airport wouldn't rent cars to wrestlers for five years!

But you take things like that in stride. Actually, when you're on tour you lose it; nothing really matters. You're working real hard, wrestling nonstop, and you just do what you want to do. Time doesn't even matter. I remember once, Tommy, Dusty Rhodes, and I went out to the parking lot of our hotel at two in the morning and we got the ring posts out of the trucks and just decided to set up the ring right there in the parking lot. The ring boys were yelling at us, trying to chase us away, but hell, we wanted to wrestle. But the fun wore off fast. We got halfway through setting up the ring and got tired, so we just went to bed. If you thought the ring boys were angry at us before, you should have seen them when we abandoned all the stuff in the parking lot and left them to clean it up. Boy, were they pissed!

We did stuff like this because we didn't care. We were working so hard we were numb. And we weren't afraid of anything. We did what we wanted to do and what we had to do, and we didn't let anything or anyone stop us.

Hell, even a plane crash couldn't stop me!

I was in Greenville, South Carolina, one afternoon and had to be in Savannah, Georgia, that night. A bunch of us were making the trip in this private plane. It was me, Wahoo McDaniels, Sergeant Slaughter, Jimmy Valiant, and this guy Freddy, who was the pilot. I remember that my left wrist was broken, only I didn't know this at the time. I had wrestled Wahoo and I took that big, old oak leg of his and jumped down on him and caught my wrist the wrong way. It hurt like hell and I was wearing it in a sling. So we're in this plane and Wahoo is giving me shit. "Boy, only sissies wear slings," he said to me. "Take that thing off." I listened to him and that's why I have this big bump on my wrist 'til this day.

But anyway, we were just about to fly into Savannah when the plane hit an air pocket. We dropped about five hundred feet! We were all thrown around. Sergeant Slaughter, all 290 pounds of him, was thrown clear across the plane. I was bounced out of my seat and my head hit the top of the plane so hard that I broke my neck! We were all stunned, but we landed safely. When I got out of the plane I needed two guys on either side of me to hold me up because I didn't have my equilibrium. They got me to the arena, and believe it or not, I wrestled. I don't know how I did it. I don't remember the match. But I didn't miss the shot. If you can walk, you can wrestle. That's the rule.

Ole was pushing me harder and harder, and I was going nonstop. I was at the top of my game, the toast of the town, and Jim Barnett was beaming. But I would soon find out that Barnett wasn't really what he was made out to be. The guy went around bragging about who he knew and how smart and powerful he was, but I would soon learn it was all a charade. Barnett impressed a lot of people in the industry with smoke and mirrors. He told everyone he'd graduated top of his class at Yale and was Phi Beta Kappa, but it came out that he had only attended one seminar at Yale and never was enrolled in the university at all. He had this picture on his wall of former president Jimmy Carter with a headlock around one of his wrestlers. He wanted everyone to believe he had connections and rubbed elbows with bigwigs. I later learned he paid $5,000 for that photo. But to be honest, I never really paid attention to who he said he knew or to any of the objects he owned. All I knew was that I was bringing in a lot for cash for this guy and he rewarded me by giving me one of the first written contracts for $5,000 a week in the industry.

I was told by Ole Anderson that Barnett was set to take on the entire industry and he wanted me to be a big part of it. I was asked if I would be afraid to go in and work against promoters in other territories, and even though I knew there were definite boundary lines in the industry that you didn't cross, I still said yes at the time. At that point in my career I was willing to do anything to succeed, even if it meant breaking the rules. I didn't give a damn. I was willing to wrestle anybody, anyplace, anytime. I didn't care. But this grand plan never got off the ground. Barnett ran into one big problem. Jim had a connected friend in Chicago, and this guy didn't want him crossing into the Illinois territory, so Barnett backed off the idea. The whole concept of Jim and Ole taking over the wrestling world was now off.

But the two men were still able to put together one of the biggest wrestling successes in the sport's history when they collaborated on *Starrcade*. While Ole and Jim were plotting to take over the industry, Vince McMahon Sr. had just done the first outdoor wrestling show in New York's Shea Stadium, which brought in over $550,000 and featured Larry Zbyszko vs. Bruno Sammartino. Larry was an underling of Bruno, and when McMahon turned Larry against the legendary fan favorite Sammartino, he needed a huge venue to accommodate all the people who wanted to witness the match, so he finally settled on the home of the New York Mets.

The success of this event caused Jimmy Crockett to dial up Barnett, Ole, and Dusty Rhodes because he wanted to one-up McMahon and his New York extravaganza. He wanted to put together something even bigger that wrestling fans would be talking about for years. It was decided that there would be a big show out of Greensboro and it would be broadcast via Pay-Per-View on the cable networks. The four men combined their efforts along with wrestlers like Ric Flair, Harley Race, Greg Valentine, and me, who were all hot. It was decided that there would be a double main event. There would be a cage match with Harley Race vs. Ric Flair for the world title. At this time, in 1983, there was a guy in Oklahoma called the Junkyard Dog, who was gaining popularity. He would fight wearing a dog collar. I told the promoters that Greg Valentine and I would fight a dog-collar match, so I went out and got all the necessary equipment to pull off this unique match. I found a truck chain, which was going to be displayed in the lobby so the people could actually touch it and see what I was going to use. And I had some spiked leather dog collars made up with sheep's wool inside. The reason I put the sheep's wool inside was to protect our necks from the leather, but all it did was give us a nasty rash.

Dusty Rhodes, Ole and Gene Anderson, and I sat down and decided that this had to be a very brutal match from start to finish. We wanted people to be talking about it for years. When we went to different towns, we wanted people to pack the houses just to see one of our dog-collar matches. This is why it had to be very bloody and brutal. It was a good plan . . . unless you were one of the wrestlers involved in the match!

When the night came for us to put on our show, everyone was high-strung. You could feel the tension in the air. Just before the bell rang for the dog-collar match, Greg and I agreed to try not to break each other's nose or teeth, but with this kind of match, well, it was what it was and we both knew what to expect. I knew going in that Valentine had the reputation for hitting his opponents very hard whenever he wrestled, so I was prepared.

The first thing we did when we got in the ring was try not to let each other get the chain because we both knew that if the other guy got the chain he would use it mercilessly. And needless to say, once we each got ahold of that chain, we got carried away. My left eardrum was broken and I lost 50 percent of the hearing. The damage was irreversible. I certainly can say that it was one of the most barbaric matches of my career, but it sure did get over with the people. They loved every second of it! And while Greg and I loved that the audience loved it, the problem was we had to do it another forty-five times over the next 60 days!

Over that span of time the cuts and bruises would heal, but that darn sheep's wool started making us look like we had some sort of disease around our necks. Valentine was really angry at me for putting the wool in the collars because it was itching him like crazy. He would take the chain and wrap it around his fist and hit me in the head, yelling, "Why did you put this stupid fucking wool in these collars!" Yet the original dog-collar match helped the *Starrcade* Pay-Per-View really set the wrestling world on fire, and when all was said and done, the event exceeded the expectations of all the parties involved, making it one of the most successful wrestling events ever held.

And when it was over, Barnett wanted even more control over his territory and his wrestlers. I was one of the hottest wrestlers around and we were selling out every town. Because I had a contract, they expected me to become a corporate man. Well, I got news for you . . . that ain't me.

By this time I was really out of hand. I was crazy-ass nuts! I was packing in the crowds, but I was also breaking all the rules. You would think that with my wife expecting our first child, I would have slowed down a bit, but Tommy and I liked living life on the edge together. We had the Sickness bad and there was no stopping us . . . Until one night when we had to wrestle in Chattanooga.

We were on our way to the match and Tommy was driving. He took a wrong turn, and by the time we realized we were lost, we had gone two hundred miles in the wrong direction. We got directions from a couple of cops in a squad car who offered to help us when they found out we were lost. They told us to put the hammer down and that they would warn all their buddies who were positioned on the highway that we would be flying on through. So taking the kind officers' advice, Tommy just floored it the rest of the way, but we were still three hours late. The matches were scheduled to start at three o'clock and we got there after six. Everyone was mad at us. But the guys stalled the crowd enough that we still got our matches in. Nevertheless, this would be the last match I wrestled in for Barnett and Ole. After the event was over and Tommy and I were getting ready to go to the next town, Ole Anderson stopped us and said: "Tommy, you can take this up with Barnett, and Piper, you're fired. You can talk to Barnett if you want. I don't give a shit."

I said, "I don't need to fuckin' talk to nobody. I'm outta here!"

I went home to Kitty, who was seven months pregnant, and told her I'd been fired. Wonderful person that she is, she just hugged me and said she loved me. The next day they sent over some poor little referee—the guy was scared shitless—and he said I breached my contract because I was late for the match. To make matters worse, they blackballed me and I couldn't wrestle in the States anywhere, and then they turned me over to the IRS.

Who is "they"? you ask. Well, I can only speculate. People were now telling me that they smelled a rat and that all the evidence pointed to Tommy. They kept whispering in my ear that Rich had been in that territory for so long that he set me up to be canned, but to be honest, I still don't believe this.

It was a rough time for me. I really didn't have anyone to talk to about what had just gone down; I didn't trust anyone in the promotion and I didn't talk to my wife about the situation because pro wrestlers are taught not to bring their work home with them.

It was the honorable thing to do. You take care of your kids and your family at all costs and put work second. You never bring your wife to a match, and you never talk business with her. Why bring the stress home? Why even discuss wrestling with your wife? What is she going to tell you? How to take a body slam?

But don't let me fool you. There are other reasons why guys didn't want their wives or girlfriends at the arena. One of them was insurance just in case somebody had a girlfriend on the side. But most of these Frat Brothers were good family men and they just didn't want their wives or kids to see them take a beating. Every one of these men was a great provider and dad. Night after night these men proved that any jerk-off can have a child, but it takes a real man to be a father. So it was a hard-and-fast rule to never, ever involve your family in the sport.

So because I didn't really talk about my work situation, I still had all this ugliness going on inside me. I couldn't believe those sons of bitches had blackballed me. And to think I had actually called some of these guys my friends at one time. Just like Sonny King once took a knife to help me when someone tried to stab me, I would have taken a knife to protect any of these guys—little did I know it was going to be one of them stabbing me in the back!

This was when Ric Flair and I became really close. He was—and is—a true friend. I had no job; no wrestling promoter wanted to take the chance of using me and ruining his good name. I couldn't wrestle anywhere, so I decided to move back to Charlotte with Kitty and try to start fresh.

In order to get all our stuff back to Charlotte, Kitty and I had to drive in separate vehicles. I rented a U-Haul truck, which I was going to drive, and my wife was going to take our Cadillac along with our miniature pinscher, Feather. I wasn't looking forward to the drive because, number one, I knew the time alone would just have me thinking about what had just gone down in Georgia, and number two, I had the unfortunate pleasure of riding with our other dog, a giant and retarded dalmatian named Ryiethumnne R. Little did I know that crazy mutt would keep me "entertained" the entire ride back to North Carolina.

But I really shouldn't have been surprised because both of our dogs, as retarded as they were at times, had given Kitty and me plenty of laughs over the years. For instance, Feather came into our lives one day after I proposed to Kitty in Atlanta. Unbeknownst to me, my wife-to-be had gone to the pet store in town the next day. She fell in love with this pup and asked the shop owner to put the little guy in the window. Then Kitty brought me down and *by accident* we passed the store and she pointed out to me how cute and cuddly the mutt was and how great it would be for her to have a dog like that to keep her company while I was on the road. So okay, I fell for the bit hook, line, and sinker, but a funny thing happened on the way home that night. I noticed when we picked up the little pup and took her home that she was a shaking mess. We couldn't stop Feather from trembling the first few days we had her. But that problem was solved when Kitty and I went out to dinner one night.

I took my lovely bride-to-be out on the town and forgot that I had left my box of Valiums on the floor at home, as we had no furniture. So when we got back from dinner, we found the box on the kitchen floor all torn to pieces and Feather just lounging around without a care in the world. The Valiums calmed that dog right down and smoothed those nerves right out! She went on to live another sixteen calm and cool years with us.

Ryiethumnne R., on the other hand, was anything but calm, especially in cars. The dog hated being on the road for any period of time because she had been in an accident once before in Walla Walla and was not very comfortable riding in a car. So I knew I was going to have my hands full with this dog for the entire 250-mile trip. But I thought if I kept the radio on and her distracted I'd be all right. Boy, was I wrong! No sooner had we pulled away from my old house than that dastardly dog started barking. My first means to try to keep her quiet was just to tell her to shut up, but that didn't work. That would have been too easy. The next thing I did was turn up the radio, but still that bastard wouldn't shut up. We were now going on about an hour and a half and Ryiethumnne was still woofing, so at this point I'd already lost it so I started barking back at the annoying animal. But whatever I was saying in dog language wasn't working either. After about another half hour, I couldn't think of anything else to get this dog to shut up, so I gave her my jacket to chew on, hoping it would occupy her for a while. As soon as she got ahold of my jacket, she took a bite out of it, and with the piece of cloth hanging out of her mouth looked at me and continued barking. That fucking dog barked all the way to Charlotte, not giving me any time to think about why I was leaving Atlanta. Boy, I hated that dog, but I love her for what she did for me that day. Without knowing what she was doing, that dalmatian kept my mind off being blackballed.

Once I got settled in Charlotte, Ric gave me a call and made me an offer I couldn't refuse. Flair and I had always gotten along, and as a matter of fact, he dubbed me the "John Wesley Hardin" of wrestling for the last twenty years. Hardin was supposedly one of the toughest gunfighters of the Wild West, who killed some twenty men—one just for snoring! He got caught, went to jail, and then came out a lawyer. As for me, while I knew I would never become a lawyer, at this time in my career I was full to the brim with talent that I was dying to express. Besides my wrestling skills, I had always watched Flair's back and he knew that I would continue to do so. Flair asked me if I wanted to travel with him overseas to work in some events in places like San Juan or Santo Domingo and I immediately told him yes. While I didn't like being away from my pregnant wife, I had an obligation to her and my unborn child to earn a living so we could have a place to live and food to eat. I almost had work in Dallas for a booker named Gary Hart, but he tried to get me at a bargain-basement price of $1,200 per week. I knew I couldn't accept this money, not when I used to make $5,000 a week, and more importantly, I had a wife and a kid on the way, so I had to take the best offer out there for their sake. I told Hart to have a nice day and I opted to go overseas with Flair to earn my keep and win my reputation back.

6

Wrestling Outside the U.S.

I couldn't wrestle in the States, so I hopped on a plane with Flair and headed overseas. Back in those days traveling on a plane was much different than it is today, especially since there was no in-flight entertainment. If you were in the air for six hours, you didn't have a couple of movies to keep you occupied. You either had to hope for a talkative and interesting passenger sitting next to you or you had to kill the time sleeping or reading a good book. But us wrestlers never had to worry about anything like that with Flair on board. He lived for those long flights. As soon as the FASTEN SEAT BELTS sign was taken off—sometimes sooner—Ric would turn to me and say, "Hey, Pipes, what do you think?" I knew what he was about to do, so I just answered, "Do whatever you want, man." Ric would then grab his $5,000 robe from the overhead compartment and go into the bathroom to change. He would strip out of his Armani suit and into his birthday suit in less than five minutes, and then come back to his seat wearing nothing but his expensive robe. The bright red velvet garment looked like it had been taken from the honeymoon suite in a seedy Las Vegas hotel, but he wore it well.

After getting comfortable, he would then take the tray from the stewardess and serve the free drinks to everybody on the airplane. The crew always loved the sweet talker and always allowed him to do whatever he wanted. Before you knew it, he'd be walking up and down the aisles hootin' and hollerin' with the passengers, and making his newfound friends his favorite drink in the world, the Kamikaze. At first this would cause me a great deal of embarrassment, but I guess after the 150th or 160th time, you just learn to go with it. Ric loved having fun and being the center of attention. Add these two qualities to his genuine heart of gold (a rare combination), and that is what has made Ric Flair the legend that he is.

But Ric didn't only clown around when we were in the air. He also liked to have fun while we were still on the ground. For instance, whenever we left Santo Domingo we would land in Florida and have to go through customs. One time, around Christmas, Flair and I were in a festive mood. While we waited in line we started singing "Jingle Bells" and Ric began to dance. I had seen Ric dance before, but on this day he was really cutting a rug. After several minutes of holiday cheer, the customs guy had seen about enough, and he came out from behind his desk to tell us to knock it off.

At about the same time we were being told to keep our traps shut, we noticed Jack and Jerry Brisco were also waiting to go through customs. How they didn't see or hear us causing a commotion is beyond me, but it turned out to be a good thing because now we decided to take our party to the other side of the room and mess with the Briscos. After yes-ing the customs officer to death and telling him we would behave, we quietly made our way toward the Brisco brothers, and without them ever seeing us, we went and leg-dived them from behind, knocking the two big lugs on their asses. If you thought we were loud before with our singing, you should have heard it when the four of us were rolling on the floor in the customs area. Here you have two Indians, one platinum blond, and a red-faced (or should I say shit-faced) guy in a kilt. How we didn't get arrested that day I'll never know. It was just another memorable day in wrestling paradise!

At this time we were again wrestling our motherfucking asses off. It wasn't all fun and games; we did have to work when we went on these trips out of the States. As a matter of fact, there was one time in Santo Domingo when I thought we weren't going to make it out alive from that armpit of the world. It was one of my first international trips with Ric and he was scheduled to wrestle the most popular wrestler in that area. I believe the man's name was Jack Benitez. Even though Flair and I had never heard of him, the entire city looked up to this guy like he was some sort of wrestling god.

The people were so in love with him that they would supposedly fill the streets just to see their hero train. Ric and I found out when we got down there that Benitez's entire training regime consisted of him running a half mile across a bridge in town. But Ric and I didn't question this because we didn't want to piss anybody off. After all, this was a country that was run by generals under martial law and the way one got higher in rank was by controlling or killing as many people as possible. Taking us out wouldn't be a problem at all for them. In their eyes, we were just two white guys from the United States. They probably would have seen it as a mercy killing.

There was a huge buzz in the city on the night of Ric's match against the town boy wonder. The arena, which had no windows or air-conditioning and was hotter than a sauna, was packed to the rafters with locals who had come to see Benitez take on the American. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. Ric and I were escorted out of the locker room to the ring by armed guards, who not only had guns in tow, but were also carrying six-inch nightsticks that had a three-inch chain on the end. The son of the country's president was even in attendance that night. I remember the soldiers, who took a liking to us, pointing him out as we made our way to the ring. He was seated in a special area and he was surrounded by a bunch of guys wearing these funny-looking swirly hats.

I have to say, even though the crowd was on us from the moment we stepped into the arena, I wasn't scared or intimidated at all, as the soldiers made us feel very safe and secure from the get-go. I knew that Ric wasn't the least bit scared either, especially when he saw what Benitez looked like when he came into the ring. This Jack guy was so small that we originally thought he was part of the midget wrestling match scheduled before Ric's bout.

So instead of just going out there and kicking the snot out of this guy one, two, three, Flair gets one of his bright ideas. He wants me to keep interfering in the match by constantly pulling Benitez's legs, which would piss off not only Benitez but the crowd as well.

So once the bell rang I did what Ric wanted me to do, which really ticked everybody off. The fans were really going nuts! The president's kid even got into it and started jumping up and down screaming unpleasantries toward Ric and me. His friends with swirly hats also got up and started yelling. At first I thought, "This is great! Look how much these people love their wrestling!" But once I noticed the swirly-hat guys patting their sidearms, I knew we were in trouble. We weren't in Kansas anymore and the guards were no longer on our side.

The soldiers started using the sticks with the chains on the closest person to them—which of course was me! Flair was safe in the beginning because he had the high ground in the ring and also because they didn't look at him as the bad guy; the whole place hated me because of what I was doing to their hero. But after a while they turned on Ric, too, and we both were in the fight of our lives—*for* our lives. The entire army and arena were now after us and we had no place to go. I had my back to the ring and I grabbed a chair for protection while my partner-in-crime was still in the ring. We had no idea how the hell we were going to live to tell about this one. Then all of a sudden a Puerto Rican wrestler, the Masked Invader, came running out of the locker room to try to help us get out of the ring unharmed. Somehow or other he managed to create a path down the aisles and got us back to the dressing room, where we thought we would find safety. But when we got there the place was a mess. All of our stuff was either stolen or trashed, including my wedding ring and a special diamond king ring that Johnny Rodz (Java Ruuk) had given me a while back.

But the chaos didn't end there. There were still people who literally wanted to kill us pounding on our door. The nut jobs managed to get the door open and started throwing pieces of concrete at Ric and me. So now with our backs again up against a wall and nowhere to go, Flair asked me as we were ducking out of the way of the stones: "Dom Pérignon, Pipes?" Here we were with our lives in danger and Flair was still a joker.

This craziness went on until about two o'clock in the morning when finally someone got an ambulance up there, which whisked us away to safety without the huge crowd that had gathered outside knowing. That was one time when I truly thought there was no way out!

Another frequent stop on our international wrestling itinerary was San Juan. The boys loved wrestling there because of the nightlife and the casinos. To be honest, it wasn't my cup of tea because I'm not a gambler. But I do remember one time that me, Ric, the Brisco brothers, and Frenchie Martin were down there and I did reach into my pocket to try my luck. Well, needless to say, I found out that night that not only was I a reckless drunk, I was also a reckless gambler. I think we stayed in a place called the Condado Hotel, and as soon as we checked in, the guys wanted to hit the tables. At first I had no interest, but I tagged along just to pass some time and have a little fun.

As soon as we got to the casino floor, Flair wasted no time as he grabbed a waitress and ordered up ninety-nine Kamikazes to get the night and a buzz rolling. It's been said that Ric used to throw his drinks over his shoulder when he thought no one was looking or that he'd tell the bartender to water his down, but to be honest, I wouldn't know, as I was too busy drinking my share. So after a couple of drinks, I loosened up and was willing to try my luck at the tables. Believe it or not, I had beginner's luck that night and I walked away with a stack of chips in my pocket.

After a couple of hours of drinking and gambling, I left the hotel with Jack and Jerry Brisco and Frenchie Martin to explore the night scene of San Juan. After stopping at a few more watering holes, we decided to return to our hotel and the casino, where I could cash in the winning chips that I still had in my pocket. But to our surprise the casino was closed. I think I was more pissed than anybody else that night because I wanted to get my money, so we decided to bring the party back to my room. On the way upstairs I decided to take my frustrations out on tall tropical plants that were in my path. In typical wrestler fashion, I clotheslined the plants one by one, knocking dirt and leaves all over the pretty hallways.

As soon as we got back to the room, one of the guys broke out some marijuana and the party started all over again. But no sooner had we started to party than there was a knock on the door, and just by the sound we knew it couldn't be good. I asked who it was and the knockers informed me that they were the police. The wrestler who had the pot jumped up to dump the remaining stash in the toilet, but in true wrestling style he didn't dump it right away. Instead, he just went into the bathroom and closed the door, hoping that the cops would go away without searching the room.

When I opened the door to the hallway, I found five police officers and two dogs standing right before me. They informed me that they had seen me on the hotel camera knocking over the plants, and before they went any further, I pulled out my hundred-dollar chips from my pocket—there went my winnings!—and started handing each of them a couple, telling them that I was sorry and that it wouldn't happen again. They told me that I would be leaving in the morning, which I was more than happy to do. They left without asking me any more questions. While I was relieved that I didn't get arrested, the guy in the bathroom was also happy, but not because I didn't have to go to jail. He had saved his supply of pot, and as soon as I shut the door, the partying continued.

But sometimes when I look back on that night, I think I might have been better off spending the night behind bars. After the cops and dogs left, we got so wasted and someone came up with the bright idea of doing shots out of Frenchie Martin's boots. Frenchie had these boots that he'd been wearing since Gandhi took the big walk for salt, and we all put liquor in one of them and started drinking out of it. The next morning we were all sick as dogs. We must have come down with athlete's throat or something from all those shots.

But the antics in San Juan weren't limited to the casino and our rooms. One day Jack and Jerry Brisco took advantage of Ric and me being intoxicated. They challenged us to a friendly game of basketball on the hotel courts, and Flair and I, being the ultracompetitive athletes that we were, decided to take them on, even though we were seeing double and wearing our bathing suits and were barefoot at the time. It was like playing four against two, with us having the disadvantage. But we didn't care. We thought, drunk and all, we could beat them. The Briscos, on the other hand, were sober and were wearing regular clothes with cowboy boots—not exactly uniforms meant for a basketball game either. Thinking back, I realize that we should have known something was up because of the way those two clowns were dressed, but we had just consumed so many Kamikazes that we weren't in any position to pay attention to detail. After running around the court like maniacs for a while, we finally caught on to what the Brisco brothers were doing. Jack and Jerry were just passing the ball back and forth, making Ric and me chase after them like two idiots. They had no intention of ever shooting. They just wanted to tire us out and get a good laugh. We not only left the court that day steaming mad at the Briscos, we also could barely walk because of all the cuts on our feet from playing barefoot on the concrete. To try and relieve the pain in our feet, we raided the local drugstore and bought several tubes of Anbesol and a couple of boxes of gauze. We still had a match to wrestle that night, so we figured that the Ambesol would numb our feet so we could dance on the mat that night like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers—Ric being Ginger of course! But just like the old saying goes: "You play, you pay." And boy, did we ever pay that day and night!

Another time I almost paid dearly I was on my own in San Juan. I somehow had gotten separated in the city from my Frat Brothers and was in a rush to catch a flight to our next gig. I was in a state of panic, not only because I had two matches the next night, but also because there were only two flights a day to Canada, so if I missed my flight, I was going to miss my matches and that wouldn't go over well with the promoters, who I was trying to get back in good graces with. On my way back to my hotel to pick up my things, I ended up getting into an argument with two local guys, one of whom just happened to be carrying a gun. Well, the argument got so heated that the police came to see what was going on, and before I knew it, these locals were telling the cops that the gun was mine. The police believed the two locals over me and tossed my ass in jail. Let me tell you, folks, it was no picnic being tossed behind bars in San Juan, especially if you wore a kilt and were as Irish white as I was. I have to admit there were some tough dudes in those cells, and you definitely had to make people aware of you. I kept telling the guards that there had been a big mistake and that it wasn't my gun, but they ignored me until the next morning.

Finally, for whatever reason, they believed me and released me, but it was too late for me to catch my flight. I called ahead to the promoter of the event and he got Terry Funk to fill in for me. Aside from this fiasco, I have never missed a wrestling match because of my health or any other reason. I made every match that I was ever booked on, but Funk started a joke that he made a living by taking the shots that I missed. Whether Funk knew it or not, this did not help me in my quest to have my name erased from the blackballed list and gain back the trust of the promoters.

One of the guys I wrestled on the international scene who left a mark on me to this day is Pedro Morales. When you talk about Morales, his lethal left hook isn't the only thing that comes to mind.

I remember a funny story regarding him and another monster of the mat, Koko B. Ware.

One evening Morales was out partying after a match until the wee hours of the morning. It was well-known by everyone on the circuit that Pedro loved his cognac, and that particular night he loved it so much that he kept it company until 7 A.M. He finally found his way back to his room, which adjoined Koko's, and closed the drapes to keep the sun that was now coming up out of his eyes when he lay down to sleep. But just as Pedro's head hit the pillow, he heard a greeting from Koko's room: "Good morning." Pedro, who is one of the finest men I ever met, answered back politely in his Spanish accent, "Amigo, good morning. But please, I'm just going to bed." A few minutes went by and Pedro heard another "good morning," and again responded calmly, asking his friend to please let him get some rest. But by the time the third greeting rolled around, Pedro lost his cool. The tired wrestler jumped out of his bed in his boxer shorts, white tank top, and dress-sock suspenders and promptly went out in the hall and smashed in his fellow wrestler's door. But to his surprise, Pedro found an empty room. Koko was nowhere to be found. The only living creature occupying the wrestler's room was his pet parrot, Frankie, who was flying around loose. The parrot was part of Koko's act and he always took it with him when he traveled.

Pedro now felt really bad because he realized that it was the parrot and not Koko who kept saying "good morning." Morales then proceeded to put the door back on its hinges so his friend's pet bird couldn't fly out, and went straight to the front desk to apologize to the owner of the hotel and also to pay for the damages he had just caused.

Even before I got in the ring with Pedro, I felt like I knew him. Ric and the guys had told me all about him so I'd be better prepared when I faced him in the ring. Morales was also curious about me. Ricky Steamboat would tell me later that before our match, as we were getting ready to face each other, Morales went up to Ricky and asked him, "Hey, is this Piper guy any good?" Steamboat said he told him to be careful because Piper would stay on him the whole match. We both tried to get as much info on each other beforehand so there wouldn't be any surprises once the bell rang.

Well, all the inside info the guys gave me on Morales wound up doing me no good because Pedro nailed me with one of the most lethal shots in the history of wrestling. We were wrestling in a baseball stadium that night where the ring was positioned right on the pitcher's mound and I was prepared for a physical match with the very strong firepluglike wrestler, but little did I know he had other ideas. When the ten-minute mark came, I had Morales in a headlock and he worked himself out of the hold and threw me on the ropes. I came back at the guy full speed off the twine and he hit me with a left-hook move that toppled me over. After getting up from the canvas, I put on the afterburners and charged Morales full throttle, and that's when he unleashed his patented blow. *Boom!* He nailed me with this open-hand palmed shot right smack in my liver. The whole stadium reacted to the flesh-on-flesh whack and groaned "*Whoa!*" in unison. They must have been thinking, "That poor son of a bitch!" I still need a transplant to this day from that vicious blow.

I had now become a regular on the international wrestling circuit and was making a good living flying to places like San Juan, Santo Domingo, and Japan. However, after paying my dues, I was finally getting some work again in the U.S., as Jimmy Crockett agreed to book me back in Charlotte. I was once again in familiar territory, like the TV studio on Tuesdays doing the weekly interviews. I have to give Jimmy credit because most promoters would not have done this. He put his ass, neck, and reputation on the line for me and I didn't let him down, as the Charlotte territory started to do great business again, which was my way of paying Jimmy back.

Working in Charlotte gave me the chance to spend more time with Kitty. Unfortunately, I spent most of my time with her in front of the fireplace, as it was winter and the furnace broke in the house that I was renting. So every night for a month I had to stay awake to throw logs on the fire in order to keep my family warm. But I'm glad I was there because I was able to witness when Kitty gave birth to our first child, our beautiful daughter Anastasia. It was one of the happiest days of my life. Anastasia came into the world on a Monday and I was back in the studio on Tuesday to do my interviews and would wrestle that evening in Raleigh, North Carolina. Ric Flair, Harley Race, the Briscos, Dusty Rhodes, the Funks, and Andre the Giant—they were all there hanging around the studio. There were empty coffee cups, chicken bones, and exhausted wrestlers lying like carnage all over the room. You could just feel the pain in the place. Most guys were just coming off a 250- or 300-mile trip from the night before.

One of the guys, I think it was Ray Stevens, said to me, "Hey, I heard you had a kid. Congratulations." All the guys came up and shook my hand. Then someone else said, "Hey, Poppa Piper!" At this point Jerry Brisco mustered all of the strength he had and lifted his head up off the bench he was lying on. "Pop a Piper? Who the hell could live through that?" he muttered. Well, Ric Flair heard this and just started horse-laughing. One thing about Ric is that if you want somebody to know something, you tell Ric Flair and the word will get around. He'll stooge on you, right in front of you. No, he's not really a stooge; he's a helluva man. So he told everyone, "Pop a Piper, get it?" and he laughed hysterically. That joke went around for years, but eventually it went back to Poppa Piper, because later in my career guys would come to me with questions and looked to me as a father figure, and the original way I got the name got lost in the shuffle.

Life was looking up again. I had my wife, my new daughter, and I was riding high in Charlotte. I had put all that shit from Atlanta behind me and was coming back just as strong as ever. I remember one night, Kitty and I were watching television and I was flicking through channels trying to find something interesting for us to watch when I stumbled upon a show on TBS with Deborah Harry from the rock group Blondie. Deborah Harry and Blondie were huge back then. They had hits like "Call Me" racing up the charts, and in this interview they somehow got her on the subject of wrestling and she said on national TV, "The worst thing they ever did was fire Roddy Piper." This showed me that not only was I known outside of my territory, I was known outside of the sport. Hell, one of the hottest rock stars in the world was a fan!

Well, this not only got Kitty's and my attention, it also created quite a buzz on the New York/New Jersey circuit. Jimmy Crockett told me that Vince McMahon Sr. was interested in using me in New York when Crockett was finished with me. This was a very honorable thing to do. Usually promoters would use and abuse the wrestler for the benefit of the territory and *then* throw him a bone telling him another P wanted him in their territory. Me, being the honorable wrestler that I am, I immediately gave my six weeks' notice as soon as I found out.

All of a sudden there was a new call of the wild! This was now the start of the second plot to take over the world. Basically I was again the "chosen one"—or at least that's what I was being told. McMahon, who told me he was going to take over the wrestling world, liked my interview style and said he was going to build the territory around me. What I didn't know was that he had probably told the twenty-five other rebels who were there the very same thing! I'm almost positive that Vince McMahon Sr. used the same line on guys like Paul Orndorff, Dave Schultz, Bob Orton Jr., Jimmy Snuka, Don Muraco, and countless others. But I wasn't too concerned at that time because I was back wrestling in the States and now wanted a shot at making it in New York, which had at one time in my career intimidated and embarrassed the hell out of me.

7

The New York Years

AFTER getting the news from Crockett that McMahon wanted me in New York, I went home to my wife and daughter and said, "Honey, we're going to New York." Kitty gave me one of those "you have to be kidding me" looks, but she never uttered a bad word about having to relocate again. She just rolled with the punches and trusted my judgment. No matter what, Kitty always gave me her full support. I wanted to give my wife and baby everything they deserved and New York had a lot to offer. I was well aware of Frank Sinatra's advice in the song "New York, New York," that if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere, and I was determined to prove that I had what it took. I was also just so in love with my daughter Anastasia, who reminded me of Shirley Temple, that I wanted her to have the best life had to offer. So if it meant packing our bags and going to New York and starting over, I was prepared to do it.

At this point in our lives Kitty was used to the craziness. My wife had been through a lot with me already, so another move wasn't that big a deal. Bob Orton had once told me to drink apple-cider vinegar every day because it was good for my joints. Well, I drank half a bottle of cider vinegar every night for six months straight, and nothing! If Kitty could live with me coming to bed smelling like a salad every night for half a year, I'm sure she could handle New York. Poor Kitty, the crazy shit I put her through.

I'll also never forget the one night in Charlotte when some insane fans found out where we lived and came to our apartment and tried to harass us. It was about midnight. The baby was asleep and Kitty and I were lying on the bed, talking and cuddling. All of a sudden we heard this hootin' and hollerin'. I got up and went to the window; our apartment looked out onto a parking lot, and there I saw two pickup trucks filled with North Carolina rednecks. They were circling the lot with their brights on, honking their horns and shouting, "Hey, Piper, we know you're in there. Come on out. We'll kick your ass!"

I had always been a lone wolf, but now I realized I wasn't on my own anymore. I had a wife and a child. I was now a father, and this was all pretty new to me, so my first reaction as Father of the Year was to overreact.

I happened to be packing two guns in the house at the time, so me, Smith, and Wesson went outside to see what these punks wanted. I ran out the door, without even buttoning up my jeans, my .357s in hand, and I just began shooting. Those rednecks turned white, just like Casper the Ghost, and scrambled to get out of there. But I just kept running and shooting, running and shooting, hoping to nail one of the bastards. Just when I had one of the trucks in my sight, my jeans fell to my ankles, causing me to do a perfect nosedive square onto the concrete. I fell flat on my face, scraping the dog out of my nose and knees. I looked up just in time to see the taillights of those trucks hightailing out of the lot.

Kitty came outside and sauntered up to me ever so calmly. She found me lying facedown on the ground with my pants down and both guns still in my hands and she said very quietly, "Are you finished, Roderick? Do you think we can go back into the apartment now, sweetheart?" I asked her to hold the guns as I pulled my pants up, and we went back inside like nothing happened. This is why I love Kitty so much. She takes me for who I am and allows me to be myself. But the key word is "Roderick" coming out of her mouth. The minute she uses my full name I know she means business. If it comes from anyone else, it won't work, only from Kitty. She has saved my life so many times over the course of our relationship that I've lost count.

Kitty has been putting up with my shit not only from our first date in the park, but also from our first day as man and wife. In 1982, we got married one afternoon in Portland in an old Scottish church, and not only didn't we go on a honeymoon afterward, but I left her alone on our wedding night to go wrestle in a match. To this day we still haven't gone on a honeymoon.

When it was time to leave for New York, we packed up our car and hitched a U-Haul trailer to the back of the Cadillac and said good-bye to Charlotte. After making the straight drive, we finally hit New York, and of course I kept with my tradition of letting a new city know that I was in town. I opened up my window and yelled: "New York City, Roddy Piper is here and I'm gonna kick your ass!" My wife looked at me strangely. This was the first time that anyone had been in a car with me when I did this.

The first thing Kitty, Anastasia, and I did was try to find someplace to live. Instead of living in the heart of all the craziness of New York City, we decided to look around in New Jersey, which is far enough away from the hustle and bustle but close enough that you could still feel the city's pulse. After driving around a bit, we settled for a small hotel right on the ocean in Sea Bright, New Jersey. After what was about to happen to me and my family, you would think I would remember the name of the place, but I guess deep down I'm just trying to forget.

Once we got settled in the room, I called a couple of people to find out when and where I was wrestling and then I was off to work.

I began wrestling all over New York and New Jersey with people like Sergeant Slaughter, Don Muraco, and Mr. Fuji, who also lived in the New Jersey area. Almost immediately I was back to wrestling regularly and keeping crazy hours. One particular night I got home from the matches around 1:30 A.M. and everyone was sound asleep. I was also dead on my feet, so I cuddled in bed with Kitty thinking I was in for a long night's rest. With our room being right on the water, the sound of the ocean waves, plus the fact that I hadn't stopped a lick since we got to town, knocked me right out. About two and a half hours later, Kitty was frantically trying to to wake me up. As soon as I heard her crying, it got my attention and heart racing and I jumped right out of the bed. When my bare feet hit the floor I realized that our entire room was flooded with three to four inches of water, with more coming fast and furious. My heart began racing even more when my thoughts shifted to the whereabouts of my baby girl, who was usually sleeping in her playpen that was now floating across the room. As the freezing seawater awoke me fully, I found Kitty had already rescued Anastasia and placed her safely in her Moses basket on top of the dresser. Thank God she was safe.

I quickly gathered my family and went right for the door, and you wouldn't believe the amount of water that just poured in when I opened it. The force almost knocked me off my feet, so it was a good thing that Kitty was behind me holding the baby. When we got outside, there was probably about a foot and a half of water, so my first priority was to get my family up to higher ground. After doing this, I made my way back to our car, which was parked outside our room, only to find that the front doors of the vehicle were already submerged. Knowing that there was no way for me to move it, I proceeded to unhook the U-Haul trailer so I could get it to safety because it had all of our valuables in it, including a mason jar with all the money we had in the world. (I still did not believe in putting my money in the bank.) So now I had the unfortunate pleasure of pulling this humongous trailer out of harm's way by these two huge chains, by myself, like Hercules. Using every muscle and ounce of strength I had, I managed to get the damn thing to higher ground, away from the shoreline. A couple of our things wound up getting ruined, like one of my wife's favorite collectible horse pictures, that still has the water stains on it to this day, as it hangs on our wall. But all in all, most of our stuff was okay.

As I was pulling the trailer, I could hear the National Guard calling out to the people on the loudspeaker, warning them about the flood and also offering to help take everyone out of the storm and to safety. They picked up my wife and Anastasia and put them in the front of the truck, and later on I caught up to them and jumped in the back. We were then taken to a local school gymnasium for shelter, and as soon as I knew Kitty and the baby were safe and dry, I hit the road to try to find us a new place to live. After searching for a couple of hours, I finally got us a room for the month at the local Hilton, but before I gave them any money, I made sure the room was on the fifteenth floor.

While I was gone, one of the New Jersey newspaper reporters came by the shelter and took a picture of my soaking-wet wife and my baby sitting in a chair. The next morning when we woke up nice and dry in our hotel, we were hit with another shock. I ordered us breakfast from room service and with our order came the morning newspaper. To our surprise, on the front page is a photo of my wife and daughter that said DESTITUTE FAMILY. Well, Kitty was clever enough to give the reporter Sergeant Slaughter's real family name so as to not draw attention to us, but it gave us the good laugh we needed after the ordeal we just had been through. I even teased Kitty that morning, saying, "Who would have guessed that you would be on the front page of a paper in New Jersey before me? Now we have two celebrities in the family."

After breakfast, I went back to our flooded hotel to try to fish out our car, and within a few hours I had dumped all the water from the soaked interior and had it up and running. But the Cadillac was never quite the same after the flood and it eventually blew up a few months later, at which time I left it on the side of the road and never saw it again. After our thirty-day stay at the Hilton, we settled into an apartment in Woodbridge, New Jersey, where Don Muraco lived.

Don and I even got to experience one of the most important days in the world of pro wrestling together. We were in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for an event that would make history.

Vince McMahon Sr. had decided that he and his son were going to take over the world. He called me personally and told me that I was "The Chosen One." He said he had big hopes for me, but he wanted to make sure that I wasn't afraid to work against any other promoter. I had no problem with this, but like I said before, little did I know that Vince Sr. had this same conversation with every other top renegade in the nation.

So we all were called into Harrisburg. It was like a *Who's Who* of wrestling. There were about twenty-five guys here: Paul Orndorff, Jimmy Snuka, George "The Animal" Steele, Mr. Fuji, Andre the Giant, Adrian Adonis, Jesse Ventura, David Schultz, Ken Patera, Sergeant Slaughter, and all these other rebels. It was first thing in the morning and we had all just come off the road from wherever we were and no one had any idea why they were calling a meeting. We were hungover, tired, road hard, and miserable. All we knew was it was ten o'clock in the morning, and we had to do interviews that day and wrestle three times later that evening. So everyone was doing whatever they had to do to come alive: chugging a pot of coffee; dancing on a mountain in Peru; Andre's got his wine; Mr. Fuji is sitting over there eating his garlic.

All of a sudden Vince McMahon Sr. and Jim Barnett come into the room, and we're all standing around trying to figure out what's going on. They asked us all to find a seat and sit down, like we were in school or something, and that just set some guys off. I really don't think they realized how pissed the guys were. They even took Andre the Giant away from his bottle of wine, which was like flirting with death! What the hell were they thinking? Anyway, after an hour of their begging and pleading for us to sit down, the twenty-five gorillas all took a seat.

We were now all ears, and wanted to know what the heck they wanted. Then they brought in some puny guy, an announcer, whose name was Vince McMahon Jr. He stood between Vince Sr. and Barnett. What a power play—so they thought! What were they trying to do—fuckin' intimidate us? They sat twenty-five top guys down thinking we'd be eager to hear what they had to say, but they were wrong. We were all established stars who had proven our drawing power over the years and who could get jobs anywhere. The McMahons and Barnett were shitting in their pants as we sat there with "what the fuck do you want?" looks on our faces.

Vince Sr. had a habit of shaking quarters in his hand, and let me tell you those quarters were going a mile a minute that day because I think he realized that we were all onto his "you're the Chosen One" bullshit. And Barnett was no better as he frantically stood in front of us in his Armani suit, smelling his tie and looking around for the nearest exit.

They then proceed to tell us that Vince Jr.—some freakin' announcer—was going to open the orders. Well, we all wanted to know what fuckin' orders they were talking about because if it was for breakfast, we all could have gone for a nice steak with some eggs at that moment.

Vince begins the meeting by saying: "Thank you all for coming, I guess you all know why we are here." And immediately Dr. David Schultz says, "Yeah, we're here to wrestle, what the fuck are you here for?"

McMahon Jr.'s face turned beet red and Senior was shaking his quarters faster and faster. Barnett, that little troll, just kept sniffing the shit out of his tie. We saw the fear in their faces. They were like three deer caught in the headlights. They had twenty-five gorillas in one room, and they had forgotten to bring the bananas!

And at that moment we knew we had them. It was a moment of triumph. For the first time the wrestlers were driving the Greyhound. We knew we had the promoters backed against the wall. There was nothing they could do. What were they going to say? McMahon Jr. cut short his speech and asked if anyone had any questions.

The room was silent. You could feel the tension and we could feel the power that we had. But then Tony Atlas, a big and strong black wrestler, broke the silence when he raised his hand and said: "Excuse me, Mr. McMahon, I got a question. You see, Mr. McMahon, every night I see Arnie [Arnie Skallard] and I get me an advance. At the end of the week when I get my paycheck, my check ain't that big."

The room was again quiet and Don Muraco slowly turned to Atlas and said: "You stupid asshole!"

At this time—let's give credit where credit is due—McMahon Jr. seized the moment. He said to Atlas: "Well, you see, Tony, I know you guys are wrestlers, but three minus one is two, and two minus one equals one. So you see, as you take it away it gets smaller and smaller." He's talking to us like we were a bunch of fuckin' kindergartners.

For three glorious seconds we had been triumphant. There was a feeling of solidarity in that room and we finally were getting the respect we thought we deserved. We had conquered the promoters . . . until Tony Atlas asked the magic question and McMahon rolled with it. Senior's quarters started shuffling a little slower, Barnett stopped sniffing his tie, and the red left Junior's face. We were now on equal ground again.

We also found out that memorable day that the three men not only wanted us to wrestle only for them in New York, they also wanted to lock us all down by having each of us sign contracts so we would be able to work only for them. Well, after my last contract experience in Atlanta I wasn't about to sign my name on the dotted line for anyone, and I wasn't the only one who felt this way. No one wanted to sign a contract and give away their rights to wrestle elsewhere. But the guys eventually gave in and signed on with Vince.

I was the very last wrestler to sign and that's only because I had no other choice—which you'll learn about later on in this book.

In his conspiracy to take over the world, Vince McMahon Jr. was making a very smart and ruthless move and only a few of us caught on to his real intentions. He wanted to corner the market, and the first thing he needed to do was sign all the best in the biz. What he was really trying to do was establish a brand—a federation that was bigger than the individual stars who wrestled in it.

Normally, when we were in an arena, the billboard outside showcased the talent that was going to wrestle that night, such as Roddy Piper vs. Hulk Hogan, and that would be what attracted the people. But McMahon slowly changed the billing on the marquee to highlight the WWF instead of putting our names there. While our names were still drawing record crowds, McMahon was trying to make it look like it was the WWF name and not the wrestlers that was bringing in the fans.

Eventually, of course, the WWF name had all the power, and with the wrestlers losing the top billing, McMahon could now pay them much less. It was now the WWF coming into town as opposed to whatever the main event was. But let's get something clear folks. McMahon did not make the WWF—the wrestlers did!

The suits didn't realize that it wasn't going to be easy keeping twenty-five stars happy all the time. It was one thing for a promoter to keep the ego of one superstar under control, but when all of a sudden you've got a bunch of wrestling rebels from all over the globe in one room, sharing one pie, you've got problems, especially when each guy was promised that he was going to be the main draw! On any given evening you never knew who was going to explode. At each event, we would sit around in the dressing room waiting for someone to snap. Adrian Adonis, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, the Iron Sheik, Tony Atlas, Mr. Fuji, and countless others—we all took our turns letting off some steam in front of our peers.

Before the WWF and WCW came into existence, wrestling was a sport that was very territorial. Back then there was a definite respect for one another's well-being in the ring and the territory you wrestled in, and if you didn't respect either rule there were consequences. The same held true for the promoters and their promotions. You just didn't invade somebody's region. But McMahon had visions of entering other guys' territories and cornering the market of the wrestling world. That's why he brought in all the best from the different areas around the country. He had a vision of an organization that reached out way beyond the tristate area and he figured if he had the best wrestlers locked up under contract to him, no one in the sport would be able to match his product. But none of us wanted to double-cross any of the promoters we were tight with in other states. Again, we had no idea where this was leading and we wanted to protect our contacts in the wrestling world.

Over the years I've seen wrestlers and promoters get hurt badly when they were caught crossing the lines. There were very strong ethics inside the dressing room. Rules, such as you never went into another guy's bag (his poke) for any reason. Even if you needed a brush and you saw one sticking out of another guy's poke, you never went over and just grabbed it. A guy's personal property was his and his alone, and if a wrestler violated the steadfast rule, he would face a stiff punishment. When it came to our livelihood, we weren't very tolerant or forgiving, especially to our own, who should have known better.

One time, unbeknownst to us, there was a thief in our room who had been stealing money from us for about a month, but no one caught wind of it because he was a smart thief. He would take only a little cash at a time while the guys were out wrestling in the ring. For example, one time a guy was talking out loud to himself, saying: "I thought I had a hundred dollars here and there's only eighty." Another night, some wrestler said: "Jeez, I could've sworn I had four-hundred-dollars?" and he only had three-hundred-dollars. Stealing was probably the worst thing a wrestler could do because we all were already aware that we were being ripped off by the promoters.

But this thief wasn't smart enough to fool everybody. Having been around the sport for so long, the late, great Gorilla Monsoon and the elders in our room suspected something was going on, and without saying a word to any of us, they put out some bait to catch the rat. One night Monsoon put a special invisible solution on some money that he left hanging out of his pocket, hoping the thief would strike.

Even though none of us knew about it, the elders' plan worked to perfection, as the thief did indeed go for the bait, and stole the money from Gorilla's pocket. When he went into the shower to get cleaned up, his dirty deed was uncovered as his hands turned beet red once the water hit them. And after a few seconds, the water wasn't the only thing hitting this prick. The undeniable lie-detector test revealed who the culprit was and the elders immediately pummeled him in the shower and laid him out bare naked in his stall. After they were through giving him the beating of his life, which left him unconscious, the elders turned on all the hot-water heads and left the thief there to bake. Justice is swift and decisive in the wrestling world.

Let's just say that he not only almost lost his life that night in the shower, he also lost his right to wrestle on any pro circuit. We just didn't take too kindly to people who were stopping us from feeding our families. From that moment on, this particular wrestler was blackballed from the sport and, to my knowledge, never wrestled in another city again.

Speaking of other cities, Vince McMahon Jr. thought he had the right to make us wrestle anyplace that he booked us because he was paying us well—not well enough, but it's easier to get fucked big—even if it meant stepping into another promoter's territory.

This would cause problems for both McMahon and the wrestlers. One of the problems that McMahon had was in Charlotte, which was run by the Jimmy Crockett, a territory I was all too familiar with. There had always been a line drawn in Richmond, Virginia, between Virginia and Washington—very Civil War–ish.

This line was very much respected over the years and no one really ever tried to cross it.

Except McMahon, that is.

The New York promoter tried to go and run against Jimmy Crockett in Charlotte, and once I saw this, I told McMahon that I wouldn't work against Crockett or Don Owens. Again, I had no contract or guarantee at that particular time, so I wasn't just going to burn any bridges for Vince McMahon or anybody else. But I also had to be realistic. The business was changing, and if I wanted to earn a living in pro wrestling, I had to change with the times. Sure, it went against who I was and what I stood for to work in a territory of someone who at one time in my career helped me out, but I still had to put food on the table for my wife and kids.

But I have to hand it to him, Vince always finds a way to get things done if he really wants it that bad. One way Vince was able to get around the territory politics was to have a benefit event in the area for a wrestler named Rick McGraw, who had just recently passed away. (I had the pleasure of wrestling against Rick in his very last match.) The benefit took place in Charlotte, with all the proceeds going to McGraw's family, and while it was a nice gesture to help a fallen colleague's family in their time of need, it was really more about breaking the wrestling boundary line. It was a way for McMahon Jr. to move in on Jimmy Crockett, and once he crossed that line, there was no stopping him. He was ready to make the world of wrestling his own and no territory was off-limits.

But even though he wanted to own all the territories in the states, McMahon was still too cheap to pay for all our traveling expenses. We would only be flown to events if they were more than three hundred miles away. For example, if we were wrestling some events in Ohio, he would fly us into the first city—say, Cincinnati—and then we had to drive to the other cities on that tour. He wanted to get the most bang for his buck without having to go into his pocket for anything extra. Speaking of extra, McMahon now also had us doing some promotional work for our upcoming matches in the cities where we were working. While I didn't mind helping promote the sport and our matches and interacting with the fans, I did mind if people were going to try and make us look like buffoons.

There was one time in Cincinnati when I was wrestling in the main event against Hulk Hogan. I was told that I was going to be presented with an award from the mayor of the city before my match. So that night, just before I was ready to go on, I put on my kilt and belt and wet myself down. I draped a bath towel around my neck and made my way to the ring, ready to fight. The arena was packed. Wrestling had really taken off at this point in time and everybody wanted to get in on the action—even the mayor of Cincinnati. When I got into the ring, there was the mayor—supposedly the youngest mayor ever—and he grabbed the mike and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have an award for Roddy Piper, the biggest cheater and low-life wrestler in the business . . ." The mayor went on and on, hurling insult after insult at me. I immediately took offense, not only at what he was saying, but also at how he was demeaning my sport. I wasn't about to let anyone diss my sport—not even a mayor. I grabbed the towel from around my neck, folded it in half, and started beating the living shit out of the guy. I kept hitting him over the head so hard that he finally fell out of the ring. This mayor was trying to make me look like some kind of cartoon character. He thought wrestling was phony and wrestlers were just a bunch of buffoons; he didn't realize that he was in the ring with a real-deal pro wrestler who never took a back step from anybody.

At first everyone couldn't believe what I was doing, but as soon as the mayor hit the floor, a group of policemen ran to help him up. They looked like they wanted to arrest me and the fans were irate. But I had a match to wrestle. Out came Hogan and I picked up on him where I left off with the mayor. I thoroughly trounced him. Now the fans were really going wild. They were screaming and throwing things at me. I had just beaten up their mayor and pummeled their favorite hero right before their eyes. However, now I had a problem. It was thirty feet from the ring to the locker room and I had to walk through a horde of furious fanatics to get there. The police certainly weren't going to protect me after what I did to their mayor, and I literally had to fight for my life just to get back to the dressing room. But this just goes to show you that Roddy Piper isn't afraid to show anyone just how real he and his sport are—even if it means beating up some prepubescent mayor in front of ten thousand of his people.

Despite these little run-ins with people who thought they could make us look stupid, our sport at the time was rising in popularity faster than ever. We were in demand all over the country and McMahon had us traveling and working a crazy schedule.

At that time as a testament to Muraco and Snuka's talent, the WWF had the weight of its business on their shoulders. Snuka and Muraco were selling out venues nightly. But, Vince thought that Hulk Hogan was everything a wrestler should be: big and muscle-bound. Vince fell in love with him as a top draw, and the Hulkster grabbed hold of the opportunity and ran with it. The two started scheming about how they were going to take over the wrestling world by killing off all the other top wrestling talent in New York. The decision to use Hogan as "The Chosen One" was made.

Vince Sr. was riding high with wrestlers such as Bob Backlund, Jimmy Snuka, and Don Muraco, but Junior had made a pact with Hogan. Vince Jr. and Hogan had a plan but there was one obstacle. The problem, folks, was very simple. Jimmy Snuka had put twenty-five years of blood, sweat, and tears into professional wrestling along with an unusual amount of talent and a body God must have chiseled himself. The fans were infatuated with the mystique of Superfly. This was making it impossible for Vince Jr. to carry out his plan of making Hulk Hogan the ultimate fan favorite.

Of course, no one's denying that Hogan played a major role in catapulting wrestling to the height of its popularity in the eighties. But people fail to realize that although Hulkamania was "running wild" at the time, he was usually running from "Rowdy" Roddy Piper.

Yes, Hogan played his "say your prayers and take your vitamins" role perfectly, but it still wasn't enough to gain the number one spot over the SuperFly. Junior still had to achieve his goal. So, this is what Junior did, and I'll let you folks make up your minds. He promoted a cage match to take place in Madison Square Garden in October 1983.

The cage match had such quality to it, that people still talk about Snuka and his cage dive to this day. It was one of the biggest moments in WWF history. McMahon heavily publicized this match, and he even talked SuperFly into this upcoming finish. This is exactly how it went folks. At the fifteen minute mark in the cage match, Snuka bodyslams Muraco. Snuka heads for the turnbuckle corner. As he starts climbing, cameras are flashing in anticipation of Snuka doing his patented dive—the entire garden was standing waiting for this beautifully executed move.

SuperFly, being the pro he was, didn't stop at the turnbuckle, he climbed to the top corner of the thirty-foot cage. With each step he took upward, the fans were in awe. Jimmy continued climbing to the top of the cage and stood barefoot and erect, lovingly panning the crowd in MSG, as they were exploding with excitement. He bends his knees and swan dives thirty-five feet down, directly onto his target, Don Muraco—and hits him perfectly. The ref dives down with a one count. I have never seen MSG so electrified in my life! Then the ref gives a two count, and Muraco kicks out. Snuka ended up losing this match because Muraco got out the cage door. Now, McMahon has made room for Hogan.

Little did everyone know that Hogan was popping vitamins like M&M's in order to try and keep up with me on the mat. Vince Sr. and Junior never expected Roddy Piper to be able to rival their new Chosen Son. I mean out of the twenty-five top dogs, I was the smallest. I didn't have any angles, I didn't have the office behind me. All I had was what my forefathers taught me and what I had learned from my wars in the ring. But that was enough to get me over.

"Piper's Pit": *The War to Settle the Score*

BESIDES being a top wrestler in the ring for the WWF at the time, I also became the Federation's main man behind the mike. I was managing two wrestlers, Paul Orndorff and Dr. David Schultz, and one night in 1983 I participated in an interview with them that led Vince to my own segment, "Piper's Pit," in the WWF.

Schultz was kind of a bully who always tried to push his weight around and Orndorff was wired and tight like the championship racehorse Man O' War. During their two-minute-and-fifty-four-second interview that night, the two burly athletes tried to hog all the mike time, not to mention that these larger-than-life wrestlers were blocking my puny ass from getting any airtime. All the wrestlers who were watching this caught on right away. Schultz and Orndorff went at each other shoulder to shoulder, leaving me lost in the background. Each wrestler had his own share of mike time, with Orndorff going first, then Schultz. They were trying their hardest to get themselves over, while also purposely leaving me in the shadow of their masses.

But at the two-minute fifty-second mark with only four seconds to go, I stole the show. I put one hand on Orndorff's shoulder from behind, and one hand on Schultz's shoulder from behind, pushed myself right in front of them, now blocking them from the camera, and said with all the charisma I could muster: "Roddy Piper—giant killer!" And the interview ended. It was the last thing the viewing audience saw and what they remembered most. My Frat Brothers also saw it and they started horse-laughing because these two guys who had tried to bury Roddy Piper during the almost three-minute interview were themselves buried in four seconds. This ad-lib not only brought the audience and wrestlers to their knees, it also opened a door for me with *Piper's Pit.*

After that successful ad-lib bit, I approached Vince McMahon Jr. in St. Louis about giving me a shot at an interview segment every week. I told him to give me three weeks, a bow tie, and a mike stand, and if I didn't "cut the mustard" I'd be out of there, no questions asked.

What did he have to lose? I tried to show the WWF head honcho that I could better serve him and the company in front of the camera, stirring the pot, than in my then-current role as a rebel manager. Well, Vince not only bought into the concept hook, line, and sinker, he had the stage crew build me my very own set, which added a bit of glitz and glamour to my segments.

One of the main reasons I established "Piper's Pit" was that there was battle among the wrestlers over how much TV time each person had, and the way it was being designated. Again, remember, you now have twenty-five of the top wrestlers in the world working in the same federation, vying for the fans' attention, so at some point egos are going to get in the way. The TV time also became an issue because the guys saw it as their opportunity to bring the spotlight on them rather than on Hulk Hogan, who McMahon was pushing down the wrestling audience's throat. Hogan was capitalizing on Vince's push and his movie fame with Sylvester Stallone in *Rocky III*, and most guys were convinced that he and Vince had cut a

Faust-like deal with the devil. They were partners-in-crime and all the rest of us were just supposed to be window dressing.

But not me. I wasn't going to settle for being second fiddle to anyone. Even when I was managing Orndorff and Schultz, I was still trying to get myself over with the crowd and get recognized. That's when it occurred to me to use my mouth. My big mouth had gotten me noticed earlier in my career in places like L.A., Charlotte, Atlanta, Canada, and Portland, so why should New York and the WWF be any different?

Again, I was going to stay away from the private family matters of my wrestling guests, but almost everything else was fair game. I wanted to keep my visitors on "Piper's Pit" off balance while also keeping the audience entertained. Right from my very first guest—wrestler Frankie Williams—I went for the jugular, rendering my guest teary-eyed and almost speechless.

Although at first it must have seemed odd to see a macho guy in a kilt interviewing another tough guy, they quickly learned that *real men do wear kilts!* The audience fell in love with "Piper's Pit" and labelled me the man they love to hate. They looked forward to me either bringing out the animal in these wrestlers or bringing them to their knees. With Williams, I did the latter.

Frankie Williams was a wrestler from San Juan who had been wrestling a long time but had never won a match. So as soon as he sat down for his interview on "Piper's Pit," I asked him, "Frankie, where are you from?"

And he answered me in his San Juan accent, "I'ma froma Columbis, Ohio."

I turned to him and said, "Oh, youra froma Columbis, Ohio, huh? Well, let me tell you something. You oughta go back to Ohio and get a job as a shoe salesman because you stink as a wrestler! You have never won a match in your life."

Now this kind of thing was unheard of in wrestling. In a wrestling interview, you usually try to put one guy over as you battle back and forth, but to say you've never won a match and that you stink had never been done before. It actually tugged at Frankie Williams's pride and he tried to defend himself, explaining to me and the viewing audience why he had never won.

"Iya maya neva havea won a matcha ina mya life, butta everytimea I goa ina there, Iya givea my wholea hearta," Williams said defensively.

And I said to him, "Well, your whole heart ain't enough," and at this point we stand up and I start hitting Frankie to push him backstage through the curtain so I could finish the segment. But Frankie's pride was so hurt that it really turned into a fight. I now had to turn it on—*boom! boom! boom!*—to get rid of him, and once I finally threw him out, I turned to the camera and said one of the many phrases that became my trademark: "Listen, you don't throw rocks at a guy that's got a machine gun."

The fact that things got so real and so physical on the air was impressive enough, but when I scored at the end with that punch line, it hit the wrestling AP in no time and the ratings started pouring in.

With the great buzz and fan reaction to the first "Piper's Pit" segment, my notoriety was well on its way. Both the fans *and* the wrestlers now looked at "Piper's Pit" as a contest to see who would blink first. But I always kept everyone off balance because "every time they thought they had all the answers, I changed the questions!" This got around the wrestling world very quickly, and before you knew it, kids at university frat houses weren't the only people watching the show—wrestling had now made its way into the homes of doctors, lawyers, kids, and parents alike. It was now hip to be watching the squared-circle sport, especially "Piper's Pit"!

Along with the personality clashes, the beauty of "Piper's Pit" was that nothing was ever written in stone for the segment. We didn't have the same guests each week and it was strictly improv. Every time it was a new experience for the audience and for me. You could always expect the unexpected, and that's what made it so popular. "Piper's Pit" was also a forum that allowed the WWF to cross wrestling over into other entertainment industries by bringing on all kinds of talent as guests. One of the first stars to appear on my show was eighties singing sensation Cyndi Lauper, with her manager, Dave Wolff. Both music-industry giants were friends of Captain Lou Albano and they loved watching me on "Piper's Pit" each week.

Well, once I found out that Cyndi was going to be a guest, I went to work, gathering material on the girl that just wanted to have fun. Besides thinking of some witty things to say to her, I had some visual tricks up my sleeve. À la Lauper, I had a clothespin hanging from my ear and had my hair spiked, which generated tremendous heat from the crowd. This would be a very important development because from that point on, Cyndi and Dave Wolff got very much involved in wrestling, and this really turned the rock-and-roll community on to the sport.

But I didn't limit my nonwrestler guests on "Piper's Pit" to the music industry. One time, at an event in Madison Square Garden, John Stossel from *20/20* came in to do some interviews, and I had him on "Piper's Pit." Once a month we did the show on NBC in place of *Saturday Night Live*: it was called *Saturday Night's Main Event*. And while Stossel was on with me, his crony was trying to get an interview with another wrestler, Dr. David Schultz, asking him if wrestling was real or fake. Schultz was now giving the *20/20* employee the business big-time, and Stossel just cut away from us and said he was going to take care of the situation. Now, I was standing about fifteen feet away from them and I saw the cocky TV personality grab the microphone from his associate and tell his crew to turn the cameras on. As soon as his guys were ready to go, Stossel said to Schultz, "Is wrestling real or is wrestling fake?" Well, no sooner did he get out the words that questioned our sport's integrity than he got a huge whack upside the head. Schultz openhanded the *20/20* reporter and knocked him down, yelling in his face, "Is that fake, asshole?" He then openhanded him again, and Stossel went down and was nearly crying for his mum. While the incident got

Schultz and wrestling a lot of attention from the press, it also ended up costing the WWF and/or Schultz a bundle after Stossel sued.

While the battle between Stossel and the WWF was resolved in the courts, another war was about to take place that brought further attention to pro wrestling. On February 18, 1985, MTV broadcast *The War to Settle the Score* live from New York's Madison Square Garden, with Hulk Hogan and me being the main event. In the months leading up to this event, I had played all my cards right. The combination of me being the Federation's number one heel and the popularity of "Piper's Pit," along with my association with Cyndi Lauper and Dave Wolff made my going head-to-head with Hulk Hogan a no-brainer.

During the negotiations for the big event, Wolff was a liaison between Vince McMahon Jr. and MTV. Lauper, who was the female vocalist of the year at the time, was going to be the rock star who would lure music fans to watch the mat sport, and Hogan and I were going to be responsible for carrying the unique event. This presented no problem for the two of us. There was always a natural chemistry between Hogan and me that was second to none.

One night we were all in Madison Square Garden and Cyndi and Dick Clark were giving an award to Captain Lou Albano, who had been in the video for her smash hit song "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." Well, before Captain Lou could even utter "thank you" to the two presenters, I came and took the award and smashed it over his head. I then almost caused the youthful-looking Clark's hair to go gray when I turned and stared menacingly in his direction and he screamed: "Please don't hurt me!" I decided to give Clark a break, but Cyndi Lauper wasn't so lucky. In typical heel fashion, I went after the poor helpless girl, and without hesitation I ended up kicking her in the head, which drew all sorts of boos and hisses from the crowd.

But believe me, things could have been much worse for the colorful singer if I had wanted them to be. Before this whole scenario unfolded on TV, Dave Wolff had asked me if I would kick Cyndi during the presentation of the award to Albano in order to get the fans buzzing about the rock and wrestling connection. But he wanted to be reassured that I wouldn't hurt her. I told Dave that I was up to the task and that I could make it look like I really kicked and injured her. But about thirty minutes before the "kicking event," a fellow from the WWF's New York office came up to me and planted a vicious seed in my head when he said, "The end of Cyndi Lauper's career could be the beginning of yours." This sat on my mind until the very moment that I had to boot her. There were moral decisions that I had to make. Do I really kick an innocent women who's going along with a story line to help promote our sport and who's also trusting me not to hurt her? Do I go against the promise I made Wolff? Or do I punt her so hard that the whole audience feels it, making the WWF brass happy.

I truly had a huge dilemma here. The Sickness of our sport had once again consumed me, leaving me to ponder what I was going to do to the rock singer when it came time to lay one on her. Do I kick her or don't I kick her? What was it going to be?

Even when Cyndi stepped through the ropes that night, I had no idea what I was going to do. I knew I had the ability to make it look real if I wanted to, but I was still thinking about what that WWF official said to me about "the end of her career could be the beginning of mine." But on the flip side, I was thinking about Cyndi's safety and the damage that of one fierce kick could really do.

When it came time to land the blow, I threw my leg at Lauper at full speed, but in midkick I decided not to hurt her and pulled back. But even though I held back, the audience, including the NYPD, thought I had gone through with it. Believe me, I could have lived with this if I wanted to—I was certainly callous enough—but the bottom line is that I chose not to. The fans thought I really connected, and boy, did it get their attention! No one could believe what they'd just seen.

The media also had a field day with this act, as it made the papers and news highlights all over the country. But my socking music personalities didn't end with that award presentation. Now it was Wolff's turn. A week or so later Dave confronted me in the ring about kicking his client, and I gave him an up-close-and-personal look at the wrestling canvas when I body-slammed him right before the fans' eyes. I was now not only the guy the fans loved to hate, I was also drawing media attention to us like never before. Even though everyone hated my guts, my antics also started a cult of "bad guy" fans. Wolff got all his friends in the rock-and-roll community to jump on the bandwagon and write stories about these incidents, and as a result we were on the front covers of music magazines as well as wrestling publications.

So now it was all set. My hard work both in and out of the ring forced McMahon's hand to choose me to oppose Hulk Hogan in *The War to Settle the Score* main event on MTV. I remember getting off the airplane at Newark Airport and seeing a camera crew from MTV waiting there for me. As soon as a mike was placed in front of me, I let the lady reporter from the music-video station know how I felt about her channel. I said that MTV stood for "Music To Vomit by" and she countered my volley by asking me how I felt about hitting a woman. I told her that I was an equal opportunist, and if women got in my way, I'd nail them just like anybody else! This caused quite a stir right before *The War to Settle the Score,* which was now going to include not only Cyndi Lauper but also Hulk Hogan's good friend Mr. T.

Mr. T was a star on *The A-Team* at this time and had a pretty good ego going on for himself (not that the rest of us didn't!), and Hogan is a great guy and a great businessman, but I don't think either one of us had much love for the other at that particular moment. But we did have one thing in common. We had a mutual friend named Rick Martel. Although we were on opposite sides of the fence, we had both been roommates with Rick Martel at some point in our careers. He had told each of us that the other guy was a decent guy and we both valued Rick's opinion. This was also a time when we were beginning to weed out who was worth risking your reputation for and who was worth trusting in the ring.

But what some people don't know is that even after I was told that I was going to help headline this special event, it almost didn't happen. The night of the event, I was in Madison Square Garden and I was asked to take a dive for Hogan, and I said no. This started a time in my career when I wouldn't take dives, wouldn't let anyone pin my shoulders, etc., but I had my reasons. I had worked too damn hard for too long to get to where I was, and I wasn't about to take a fall for anyone. Don't get me wrong—I had no problem with losing to the guy, but not by pinfall. I knew that if Hogan pinned me that night, it would be the end for me. Hogan would just move on to the next heel of the month, and where would that leave me? I wasn't some flash in the pan, so I wasn't about to let that happen.

When I approached Captain Lou Albano and told him what had just happened and what I wanted to do against Hogan, he warned me that McMahon and Company wouldn't understand. They only saw it as a star-studded match that they had put a lot of money on the line for and didn't care about any other wrestler's career at the time except Hogan's. The Captain advised me to stick to my guns and with my aggression and strength never let anyone pin my shoulders. So I held out and told them I would only lose to Hogan by DQ. McMahon and Hogan finally agreed to my demands and the match was ready to roll. I now became king of the disqualifications.

The two of us had a lot of energy that night in MSG. I remember I wanted to get under the skin of all the Hulkamaniacs and the MTV viewers before we even started to wrestle, so I wore a Hogan T-shirt, which I ripped off like Hogan as soon as I got in the ring, and I carried a very expensive Gibson guitar, which I smashed right before the crowd's eyes. These antics electrified the fans almost immediately. This was now the new brand of wrestling. No longer was it just a sport of hand-to-hand combat, it was now also a show. It wasn't like winning the Super Bowl, World Series, or an NBA Championship, it was a new energy.

I remember Gorilla Monsoon behind the mike that night explaining to the viewing audience how the crowd was screaming and yelling for us even before we exchanged a blow. When the bell rang, Hogan and I didn't waste any time, we just charged each other and began trading punches. This set the tone for the wrestling from then on. Hogan and I were able to bring the sport to a whole new level as we combined showmanship and intensity in the ring like never before. There was a legitimate heat and animosity there. There was this six-foot-seven-inch tanned guy with twenty-four-inch arms facing a very real bagpipe-playing kilted six-foot-one-and-a-half-inch, 232-pound guy in the ring, and they hated each other.

As the match got going, we had the people in the palms of our hands. About five minutes into it, I sensed that everyone was in tune with what was going on. Everyone was totally committed—the fans, the wrestlers, and the promoters. As the match came to the fifteen-minute mark, Hogan was down and I was yanking on his yellow hair, so Paul Orndorff and Mr. T both jumped up and raced into the ring. The outcome of *The War to Settle the Score* came down to me sucker-punching Mr. T.

After landing the lethal blow, a New York City policeman jumped into the ring and grabbed me, but I flung him away. Then all hell broke loose as other policemen rushed to the mat to aid their fellow man-in-blue. You now had real people getting involved in this historical event. But at the time the cops weren't concerned with being a part of history; all they saw was one of their own being tossed aside like a rag doll before twenty thousand people by this crazed man in a kilt. In a matter of weeks I had managed to kick Cyndi Lauper, punch one of the supposed toughest guys in America on national TV, and piss off New York's finest. I was capitalizing on my opportunities, and was also helping put our sport on the map.

Hogan and I were definitely in a zone that night in Madison

Square Garden because not only did the cops and fans in attendance know the feud was real, but MTV wound up having its highest-rated program of the season. We not only made wrestling and MTV history that night, we also set the stage for wrestling's most historical event, *WrestleMania I*.

9

WrestleMania

ONCE again Vince McMahon Jr. broke new ground, along with Cyndi Lauper and Dave Wolff, and created a wrestling event that was the hottest ticket in New York City. A little over a month earlier the trio had successfully combined the rock-and-roll and wrestling worlds on MTV and were now looking to expand their horizons by putting together the greatest wrestling show ever. The threesome was banking on McMahon's money and his wrestlers' talent along with Lauper and Wolff's connections in the entertainment industry in order to pull off a Super Bowl of wrestling.

The groundbreaking event was going to be held in the heart of New York City in Madison Square Garden on March 31, 1985, and Hulk Hogan and I were going to headline. But this match was going to be different from the MTV one. Hogan and I weren't going to be wrestling one-on-one. Instead, the main-event match was going to be a tag-team war, with each of us bringing a partner into the mix.

The WWF officials had to pick a new partner-in-crime for me, since my bodyguard at the time, Ace (Bob Orton), a great friend, had his arm in a cast. An incredible athlete and wrestler, "Mr. Wonderful" Paul Orndorff, was chosen to wrestle in his place. We were matched against Hogan and his acting buddy Mr. T.

I got my first taste of the magnitude of *'Mania* when Vince held a press conference at Rockefeller Center a few weeks prior to the event. I was a little late in arriving and I have to admit I wasn't quite ready for it. I didn't realize the enormity of what I was getting myself into. In the hallway, two people from McMahon's art department handed me two painted-framed pictures of Mr. T. I had no idea why they were handing me these photos or what it was all about. I was even more shocked when I opened the door and all of these flashbulbs went off in my face. When all the spots before my eyes went away and I was able to regain my vision, I noticed there was a dais and podium set up on the left side of the room where Vince McMahon Jr., Hulk Hogan, Mr. T, and Paul Orndorff were answering questions from the huge press contingent. I also noticed that there was a sign on the table that said "ROWDY" RODDY PIPER, and before I could slide into my chair without disrupting what was going on, Mr. T stands up and flexes his biceps toward me and says in his usual tone, "I pity you, fool." The *A-Team* star also had one of those metal bars with a spring in it that he was bending in his gloved hands. And while he was standing there flexing his muscles, I walked over to him and coolly squeezed his head and said, "Gee, it feels pretty soft to me." Then, for good measure, I gave his Mohawk a little rub.

Well, did this ever get T and me started off on the wrong foot! I didn't know you weren't supposed to touch Mr. T, let alone feel his head. This really pissed him off, but to be honest, I really didn't care. This was my element, my place of work. He was just along for the ride. Mr. T took an instant dislike to me, and I could sense that there was now a problem arising between the two of us for the match that was about to take place.

The matter only got worse when Vince and his boys wanted me to take a dive in the main event, causing my partner and me to lose to Mr. T and Hogan. For a second time in a few months I had to refuse to lose, especially to a "foreigner" who they were bringing into our wrestling culture. The reason I flat out refused was strictly business. If I took a dive here to this clown, where would I go the next time they brought an outsider into our world? If T had been one of our guys, I would have taken the fall. But my thinking was, if you take an outsider who is just going to do a wrestling event and then leave, why give him the fall and let him go back to his industry laughing at me behind my back and portraying everything in our world as a joke. In my eyes, it was wrong according to the code of ethics I had been taught. Well, I guess my unhappiness about this got out in the locker room, and McMahon went to Orndorff, and Paul told him the same thing—a blunt no. So now we've got a big-time match here and nobody's willing to take the dive against the intruder.

In a last-ditch effort to get me to change my mind, Vince asked to talk to me, so we ventured into his favorite place to do business—the can. We'd flush the commode every once in a while as we were talking—that's just a wrestler thing to do—and McMahon again asked me to take the dive against Mr. T. But I stood my ground and told him that it was wrong, and that I wouldn't do it. I also then planted a seed in his head and said: "Who will you draw more money from, Hulk Hogan vs. Roddy Piper or Hulk Hogan vs. Paul Orndorff?" With that question we left the john, and McMahon went to Orndorff and told him what I said. But again I didn't care. I knew my value in the sport and I also knew what the wrestling code of ethics was, and I wasn't going to let McMahon or anybody else make a fool of me or our profession.

A couple of weeks later a second press conference, also at Rockefeller Center, was held, and Mr. T and I again bumped heads. I walked up onto a three-foot-high stage area, and to this day I think I was set up, because as I was talking, Mr. T blindsided me and hit me with a leg dive. We both went tumbling off the stage into the crowd that was jam-packed with journalists from all over the world. Flashbulbs once again started going off like crazy as the photographers closed in on us to get a better shot of T and me rolling around on the floor. When security finally jumped in to pull us apart, I was so pissed off that I couldn't see straight. The blue spots that were again dancing before my eyes came courtesy of the camera flashes, but the red I was seeing was all due to the anger that was boiling inside me from the antics Mr. T just had pulled. Even after we were pulled apart, I still wanted to kill this guy. With my eyes wild like a stallion's, I glared over at Mr. T, hoping he would come at me for more, but security didn't give us time to go another round. They just whisked me out the door. This incident really pissed me off. I was taught that if you've got a problem with a guy, take care of it behind closed doors in the locker room—never in public. In front of the camera was business.

At the next press conference, televised via satellite, Mr. T was in Los Angeles with Hogan and I was in New York with Orndorff. At the West Coast gathering, Mr. T came out with a kilt on and a rubber chicken in his hand, and he said to the press, "All Piper is, is a chicken, and wears this silly dress. I pity the fool." He then tried to rip the head off the chicken, but it was a rubber chicken from a magic store and all it did was stretch. *I* pitied *this* fool for trying to make an impression! He literally had the chicken on the ground, with his foot on its head, trying to rip it to shreds, but that rubber bird wouldn't rip for nothing. Finally he just took the chicken and threw it down in frustration. To add to Mr. T's dilemma was the fact that I was in New York via satellite horse-laughing at the fool!

The next time I saw Mr. T was at a show at Nassau Coliseum before *WrestleMania,* and I was waiting for him and he knew it. He came in with his manager, Peter Young, and I asked Peter to excuse us because this was personal. I took Mr. T into a room and asked him what the hell he thought he was doing. He told me he didn't mean anything; he was just trying to enhance the show. I explained to him that we didn't do that kind of stuff unless we all knew about it ahead of time, and not to try to enhance the show because he didn't know what the fuck he was doing! We left the room after our little talk, and I knew right then and there that I was going to mess him up in the match. I had every intention of back-suplexing him on his head on the floor. At all the events leading up to *WrestleMania,* I had expressed how much I didn't like this guy, and now I was determined to show it.

The animosity level between us four main-eventers was rising with each passing day. Mr. T couldn't wait to teach me a lesson in the ring, I couldn't wait to suplex the loudmouth actor on his head, Orndorff wasn't happy that McMahon told him he had to take the dive that night, and Hogan was going through the usual emotions he felt every time he and I squared off in the ring, perhaps even more so since I wouldn't take a dive—especially for an outsider. All the talk about me not taking a dive was coming out more and more, and it wasn't justified, but there was no time to explain this to anyone before this event. But there is also this code of behavior. I have never backstabbed *anybody* in my profession, but I'll be the first to admit to front-stabbing them right in their face!

Right before *WrestleMania* Mr. T and I were in this warehouse with Vince McMahon Jr., and the bookers were trying to teach Mr. T, basics like how to lock up. This made my animosity meter go a few notches higher. I was already hot over Vince's asking me to take a dive against this guy; now I see that Mr. T didn't know the first thing about wrestling. This really insulted me. To make matters worse, McMahon then cornered me and asked me again to do something I didn't want to do—sign a contract.

I had still been holding my ground up to this point, refusing to sign on the dotted line, but on this day Vince caught me off guard when he asked, "Hey, Hot Rod, can I speak to you for a second?"

The reason McMahon called me Hot Rod was that it's a name I had made up before I came to the WWF and he trademarked it, hoping to capitalize on it one day. He kept calling me Hot Rod instead of Roddy Piper because he owned that name, and it was also part of the brainwashing that he used on all his wrestlers to try and show he was in control—to him, he owned Hot Rod. He may very well have owned the name, but he sure as hell didn't own me. I wasn't intimidated by him or by his tactics; that's why I was the last wrestler of the original group to sign a WWF contract.

Vince and I then sat down in the warehouse on two crates to talk business. I had no idea what he wanted to talk about. Maybe it was about the match. All I was thinking about at that moment was that he had asked me to take a dive against some TV star who had no idea how to wrestle (and that my ass was killing me from sitting on that fucking crate). So I couldn't wait for us to finish. Vince then proceeded to open up his briefcase and he put this contract in front of me. I looked at him and he looked at me and there were about four or five beats of silence. He finally said: "Hot Rod, you know things are changing and I can't have you in *WrestleMania* unless you sign this contract."

This, too, caught me by surprise. *WrestleMania* was only a little over a week away and I had been busy running around like crazy to promote the event, and here I was trying to help train Mr. T and Vince hits me with *this*? I looked over at him and said, "You cocksucker." He started laughing and said, "What? You can't fight city hall forever, Hot Rod." And that's how he got me to sign a WWF contract. Unfortunately, I couldn't steal this one back like I did in my early days, but after a while I calmed down. I liked Vince and I think he had some sort of a liking for me. There was some sort of chemistry there even though we didn't always see eye to eye.

Later on Vince called the four of us into his office, as well as the bookers and the rest of his staff, to discuss how we were going to do the match. I told him that I knew the right way to do it. He said, "Well, Hot Rod, there's more than one right way to do a match." But I told him that there was only one right way to do this one. I knew this because I had worked in so many different territories, and I'd seen what happened. I told them that the only way to do this with Mr. T and at the same time keep our credibility and our "real estate value" was to keep it as tight and as close to amateur as possible. We couldn't let Mr. T throw any punches; they would look too bad. I knew that if the match wasn't done right, it could be a catastrophe. I knew we wouldn't make any mistakes if we kept it nice and tight, and eventually we'd have to give the tag back to Hogan because we knew he could carry the ball. In an event of this magnitude there was no room for error.

March 31 finally arrived and Madison Square Garden was alive and kicking. I remember being in my limo and feeling the electric atmosphere outside the arena. There were thousands of screaming wrestling fans crowding the streets, so my limo had to keep circling the building, trying to get us inside. On about our fifth pass around the block, my driver got the attention of one of New York's finest who was patrolling the area on his horse, and he told him who he had in the car and that we needed to get into the Garden. Before the cop decided to help us, he came up with the bright idea of telling some of the fans who was in the limo. "Hey, we got Roddy Piper in here!" Well, that just started the fans going nuts! Before you know it, the news spread like the plague and the crowd starts rocking my limousine. Finally, before the fanatics turned over my limo, the officer got the attendant to open the garage door and we got inside unharmed. Another minute of that and I was either going to throw up all over the backseat of the car or I was going to be taken hostage by thousands of crazy wrestling fans.

Once I got inside Madison Square Garden, it was like being at the Academy Awards. There were stars everywhere, from all walks of life. I was rubbing elbows with Liberace, the Rockettes, Andy Warhol, and countless others. Warhol even went out of his way to meet me. He had a young kid with him, and to be honest, I didn't know who Andy Warhol was at the time. And when the young kid started taking pictures, I realized that the freak wasn't snapping pictures of Andy and me, but of my wrestling boots, so I decided that I had enough. I didn't understand what was going on and I didn't want to wait around to find out, so I told them I had to leave in order to get ready for my match.

No sooner had I left Warhol than I found Vince McMahon Jr. pacing the halls. The aura of excitement and nervousness was getting to the WWF head honcho and he looked like a deer caught in the headlights. This was one of the first times I had seen McMahon as white as a ghost and at a loss for words. The press had even gone up to him hoping to get a sound bite or two before the event, but Vince was in a zone at the time—the Twilight Zone! Reporters went up to Vince and asked him the burning question, "Is wrestling real or fake?" and Vince just said, "Uh, I don't know?" Way to go, Vince!

But truth be told, Vince had a lot riding on this night. Not only was his Federation's future riding on the success of this particular show, but his whole life's savings was also on the line. It was either kill or be killed for him, so I can truly understand his concerns. But about a half hour before the curtain went up on the historic event, I couldn't take it anymore! I grabbed him and said, "Sit down, you're driving us all crazy! It's just another match."

About the same time that I'm shaking some sense into Vince, Mr. T and his *two* limousines are trying to get into MSG. The *A-Team* star was trying to get into the same door that I had been trying to get into earlier, but the security wouldn't let two limos in at once. They didn't care who it was. They were under orders to let in only one car at a time. So now Mr. T turns into "Mr. Hollywood" and tells the guards that if both limos couldn't go in, then he wasn't going in. When Hogan gets word of this he personally goes down the ramp to the gate and tells Mr. T that he isn't going anyplace. Hogan then hauls the gold-chain-wearing TV star's ass into Madison Square Garden.

Mr. T finally got inside the arena, and as we were getting ready to go on, he started breathing into this oxygen mask. I now thought there was something physically wrong with the guy, and that we were going to have to go on without him. But little did I know that he was doing this to get ready for the match. This was part of his "training." What a loser! I also got to thinking to myself that he was going to need more than an oxygen mask when I got through with him!

It was finally time to start the show, and I'll never forget that buzz and roar of the crowd when we made our way to the center of the ring—twenty thousand screaming fans packed into the world's most famous arena! I remember thinking that the electricity from the crowd could've lit up all of Broadway and Times Square and then some. Speaking of Broadway, all the stars from all walks of life were out that night to witness wrestling history in the making. Frank Sinatra, Gloria Steinem, Rod Stewart, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, Andy Warhol, Liberace, Twisted Sister, Little Richard, Dick Clark, the Rockettes—the A-list just went on and on. And once we got through the ropes, Muhammad Ali, who was a special referee that night, was waiting there to greet us. All I could think about at that moment was several years earlier in L.A. when I had hip-tossed him out of the ring during his training for a bout, and I was hoping he wouldn't try to get revenge for that night. But I think I was safe because I had met him one other time at one of the press conferences before *WrestleMania* and had said to him, "The last time I saw you I had hip-tossed you on your bum!" and he just stared at me and bit his lower lip as he was famous for doing.

At one point during the match, I went out on the floor by the ring posts and found myself in quite a predicament. Hogan also made his way out of the ring and onto the floor, and when I turned to go away from Hogan, I found myself staring at Muhammad Ali. He threw one quick punch at me—which missed—and I had to decide which way was I going to go—toward Ali or toward Hogan? Right now it was a decision of survival. Even though Ali was way past his prime, I decided to take my chances with Hogan. I was safer that way.

The match turned out to be an overwhelming success—way more than McMahon had even wished for himself. But I soon found out just how highly my efforts in *WrestleMania* were thought of. The match was finished after Orndorff took the fall thanks to the involvement of Jimmy "SuperFly" Snuka and "Cowboy" Bob Orton, allowing Hogan and Mr. T to leave the ring winners just like everyone wanted. Immediately following the event there was a huge party for Hogan and T with champagne and good eats, but nothing for the losers (as is the tradition in America). Orton and I went back to the dressing room to shower, and while we were cleaning off the blood and sweat from the match, the victors were being whisked off to another party. After drying off and finding ourselves alone—except for the irritated janitor who wanted us to leave so he could clean up the dressing room—we walked back to where the limousine was supposed to be parked, and to our surprise it wasn't there. We then walked down a circular driveway to the bottom of Madison Square Garden, hoping to find our ride down there, but there was nobody around, only a few hard-core fans. The only familiar face was that of the policeman on the horse who had helped us get into the building at the beginning of the night. We asked him if he could call us a cab, and in typical New York fashion, he told us to hail one ourselves. As he was saying this, his horse started taking a huge dump right before our eyes. Orton, who was burning mad, sees the first piece of crap come out of the horse's ass and says, "Shit," just as it is hitting the ground. The second poop fell and Orton goes, "Shit." Third poop, Orton goes, "Shit." Talk about understatement. Why isn't there a limo here for us and why is this horse shitting in front of me? And where the fuck is everybody else?

Two hours ago we were part of the hottest ticket in New York and now we're standing outside the bowels of Madison Square Garden watching a horse move his bowels! This shows how much we were really cared for by the promoters in the industry. It doesn't usually slap you in the face this hard, this soon, but it did that night. This was the biggest event in wrestling history, and the two of us had played a huge role in pulling it off, but we were left out in the cold in the end! If you look at the tapes from that historic event, everyone from vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro to Dr. Ruth Westheimer was saying, "Roddy Piper, you're going to get yours!" Little did I know that they were going to be correct on so many different fronts. I sure did get mine that night—both inside and outside the ring!

But when all was said and done, who really drew *WrestleMania I*? It's no secret that they pushed Hogan, and gave him most of the credit, as evidenced by the postgame parties thrown for him, but I truly believe I played a significant role in the success of the event. I put my life and ass on the line, and was willing to die in the ring if that's what it took to make *'Mania* a success, and what did I get when it was all over? Nothing. No limo. No party. No thank you. I was left to fend for myself while Hogan and his crew were off somewhere drinking and munching on McMahon's tab. This is where a tremendous jealousy factor came into play for me. But that old saying "You can't find sympathy in the dictionary between shit and suicide" kept playing in my head over and over that night every time I thought about the situation.

After all, if you look at all the effort and hype that went into *WrestleMania,* who was the one who was stirring all the interest? It wasn't Hogan. It was me. I had been hyping the event for weeks on "Piper's Pit," which was the most-watched part of any wrestling show—not Hogan's matches. The segment allowed us to promo the event every time we wrestled a card and it also broadened our demographics by twofold at the time, allowing us to reach way more people than even Vince imagined. Even though these people were rooting against me, they either bought a ticket or were tuning in just to see what was going to happen to me. Let the truth be known, people didn't watch *WrestleMania* to see Hulk Hogan fight—they watched hoping Roddy Piper would get his ass beat.

TV SHOWS

WrestleMania wasn't the only successful wrestling show in the 1980s. Our sport was really peaking around this time, and we weren't only making a killing at the arena box offices, but we were also all over TV. A WWF program aired on NBC on Saturday nights once a month, and we had our own cartoon series on CBS called *Rock 'N Wrestling,* which brought all of us into the world of animation. Never in my wildest dreams had I thought I'd be in a cartoon! It was a cool thing to see. And again I attribute most of our success to the efforts of Dave Wolff and Cyndi Lauper. The two not only lent their lives to the wrestling world, they were solely responsible for putting the rock—and I don't mean the current WWF superstar either—in the rock-and-wrestling product of the 1980s. These two deserve a lot more credit than they get. And I understand that Vince McMahon got off cheap when it came time to pay Cyndi Lauper. I was told by Dave Wolff that the Grammy-winning singer received only $1,500 for her appearance at *WrestleMania.* Wolff was aghast and insulted that someone would pay so little money to a superstar singer for such a great contribution. But such are the facts and maybe there is a little more understanding now as to why I carry a bit of a grudge and jealousy toward Hogan, who was getting pampered by the Federation at the time. I felt he wasn't the only one who was doing the work to get our product out there. There were plenty more people involved in making the WWF a success, but only a few were being justly rewarded.

I was fighting tooth and nail to stay alive and keep myself in the limelight. Every little bit of success I was having was directly attributed to my hard work and good decision-making. The fact that I didn't take the fall in *WrestleMania* paid off powerfully because I was able to keep my feud with Hogan hot while also using "Piper's Pit" as a vehicle to keep myself over with the crowd. Everyone dreaded being on "Piper's Pit" because they knew I would grill them and put them through the wringer. It was almost like whoever got the short straw was chosen, but there were also people I liked having on the "Pit." This started a basic saying in the wrestling world that "If you weren't in the 'Pit,' you weren't shit!"

JIMMY SNUKA—THE COCONUT INCIDENT

While "Piper's Pit" was a hoot to do, it was sometimes hectic to shoot. Once every three weeks we usually shot the segments for that night's show along with the following two weeks' interviews. While the work was hard, the fact that in my sport at this time there was no such thing as rehearsal made it even tougher. We only had one shot to get it right. But the one-shot deals also made for some great TV moments. I remember one time when we were in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and Chief Jay Strongbow was in to tape a segment with me. I always looked forward to working with the chief. He was a very smart man who was always full of great ideas when it came to our business. I also used to get a kick out of the way he used to call me Rodney. On this particular day he asked me if I had ever picked up a coconut and knew how heavy they were. When I told him no, he went on to tell me that he thought it would make a great prop on one of my segments. As soon as he said this, another wrestler, Jimmy "SuperFly" Snuka, came to mind. I always used to get on Jimmy's case about being Polynesian and that all his people did was lie around on the beach getting sun while their grandmas sold trinkets on the street to support their families. While that sounds rather heavy and personal, I knew what I could get away with when it came to Snuka. This was just the "craft" of the interview. When I mentioned this to Chief Jay, without hesitation he told me that I should hit the Polynesian guy on the head with a coconut. I forgot about it until about an hour later, when the chief had someone go to the supermarket and buy some bananas and coconuts. The chief was really hell-bent on seeing me do some noggin knocking on Snuka that day. So, with fruit in hand, Strongbow came to find me so we could talk about what should happen on the segment.

As we were talking, I picked up one of the coconuts and realized just how heavy it really was. I thought to myself, "Wow, this could really hurt," but then I also realized how great the interview could be if I whopped him in the head with this hard piece of tropical fruit.

About a half hour later Jimmy Snuka came onto "Piper's Pit." Whenever he was on he didn't have to say anything, he just had to look at you with his eerie stare to make good TV. SuperFly was one of those very scary individuals who didn't have to utter a word to be intimidating. I remember starting the interview, and I was trying to tie the coconuts and the bananas into the segment, but I wasn't doing such a great job because all I was doing was thinking about how heavy and hard this fucking coconut really was and that I had to hit him with all my might so that it would break on his head. Well, here came the moment of truth, and I hit Jimmy Snuka as hard as I could, and that coconut burst like a bomb! The instant it hit I heard Jimmy give a moan that came from the depths of his soul, and he started falling back and tried to take the set out with him. I'm not positive, but I am pretty sure he was unconscious upon impact. When he was on the ground, I started whipping him hard with the belt that went around my kilt. When he came to, he crawled on his hands and knees and then finally got up. The Polynesian grappler immediately went bananas and came after me, but I slipped into the locker room, shut the door, and locked it. On TV all you saw Jimmy doing was hitting this big industrial door, and then they took him away and escorted him to the other dressing room. I was told that Jimmy just stared at the floor for about ten minutes and didn't move. They say to this day that Jimmy Snuka feels the repercussions of that coconut hit. SuperFly really put it on the line for me that day. Truth be told, it was Jimmy Snuka who put "Piper's Pit" over the top not Roddy Piper. He was one of the people who helped make "Piper's Pit" a success. When the coconut story got around the wrestling world, all of a sudden Roddy Piper and Jimmy Snuka were selling out Madison Square Garden. What impressed me even more was that Jimmy was having some personal difficulties at this time, but he never let it get in the way of his work. He always remained a pro, especially in the ring. He is one of the all-time greats.

ANDRE THE GIANT

Another consummate professional in the ring was Andre the Giant. Andre was an incredible man who I always enjoyed wrestling. He had a soft spot in his heart for me. It wasn't because he just took a liking to me. Andre would come in over the years to every territory that I was wrestling in. He would always tell the promoter to put Piper in the ring. There was a reason for that. With Andre the Giant, most wrestlers got in the ring, and when he hit them, they threw themselves in the air and begged for mercy. The match would last five minutes and Andre would just eat them up and pin them.

The first time I wrestled Andre, I had my kilt on, and I was wiggling my bum, and people were whistling as I took off my T-shirt, and Andre grabbed it and put it on. Well, he looked like Baby Hughie, and everyone was just roaring. This really showed the size difference between us. When Andre would hit me, yes it knocked me down, but I'd get right back up as fast as I could. I'd get into his hair, and bite him and hit him and whatever else I could do.

Well, that made Andre the Giant comfortable and he let me beat the dog out of him, but let's face it, he was a giant. That's why he liked me, because I was putting my heart into trying to beat this guy. He was comfortable in the ring selling for me. This went on for years and we became good friends. Andre would take me to a restaurant called the Pantry in Los Angeles. He would make me eat "The Andre" special because he wanted me to gain weight. "The Andre" special was a big dinner—a ham steak with twelve eggs and hash browns, washed down with about four quarts of diet Coke! The Giant mixed it all together for me and, like a mum, would say to me, "Now eat it and no leftovers." He would drag me all over, even when he went to see the promoters. We hung out a lot together over the years. He loved to joke around. We'd be in restaurants where there was a live band, and Andre would tell them that he wanted to sing a song. He'd tell them to just play any tune, and he would sing "the fish song." He would pull his ears up and suck his cheeks in to make a fish mouth, and of course everyone thought he was hilarious because Andre was a giant. He loved to fart in elevators, the more people the better, the better dressed and more highfalutin the ladies the better. His bum was about head-high with everyone else, and these people would go down like flies on a no-pest strip! You've got to understand, giants make *giant* farts. But he wouldn't make a face, wouldn't crack a smile; it would just be like nothing happened.

Andre always seemed to be looking out for me in the ring, whether it was a concern for my well-being on the mat or my status in a particular promotion. I remember one time he did me an incredible favor without my asking. I was in Madison Square Garden in a tag match that had David Schultz and me booked against Andre and Jimmy Snuka. The giant-size wrestler allowed me to jump on him and start beating him to the point where he was bleeding all over. The referee then stopped the match and paramedics tried to carry Andre out on a stretcher, which was a useless battle for the six poor guys. Andre ended up walking out on his own and then coming back all bandaged up to finish the match. No one had ever really done that to Andre. It really put me on the map, and I knew it was a respect thing that Andre was willing to do that for me.

Andre the Giant, he was a wonderful, fun-loving guy.

But getting in the ring with wrestlers like Andre the Giant was nothing compared with what we were dealing with outside the ring in the 1980s. Our work was becoming tougher and tougher with each passing day because around this time wrestlers in their prime began dropping like flies. Even though it seemed to everybody on the outside that every day was Christmas for pro wrestlers in the eighties, the rough and tough industry was taking a very heavy toll on all of us. Rick McGraw had died and other guys had been overdosing like crazy. Between the number of matches we were doing a week, the hectic travel schedules we were keeping, and the fact that we were away from home 75 percent of the year, a lot of stress was going on in our lives and locker rooms. I had refused to work against Don Owens for the first two years after *WrestleMania,* and it was looking as though there was only one individual—me—fighting the system. But all I was trying to do was to keep the code I was taught to keep—honor above all. Well, in the end it came down to the bottom line and earning a living to help take care of my family. Sure, it would have been nice to be able to uphold the code, but it didn't work out that way. I had to work against Don Owens even though I really didn't want to, but you realize pretty quick, especially when you have a family to feed, that family comes first no matter what or who.

However, in our business, the losers had to continue on and make money for their families. We didn't have the same benefits as the chosen ones like Hulk Hogan. This is where the bitterness and the evilness enters, as you are the only one sticking up for your family. As Hogan has lunch pails out, so does Roddy Piper. As hard as they are all pushing Hogan, I am trying to keep myself on top. I didn't have the support of a big industry behind me. I was just doing what I was trained to do. I felt that they could knock me off at any time and go onto the next person, as was the tradition. I was trying to keep my real estate value as high as I could. It was very hard to make a split between being a dad and being "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, but I knew I had to do whatever was possible in order to keep bread on our table.

At this same time there was a war going on in all fronts. Vince McMahon Jr. was very much involved. For instance, at the Olympic Auditorium, if the main event was Chavo Guerrero vs. Roddy Piper, or Roddy Piper vs. Hulk Hogan, McMahon was slowly changing the emphasis to his company rather than promoting the individual wrestlers who were on the card. A few of us knew what was going on and we were fighting it, but it was a fruitless fight. McMahon would just say the WWF and just say our names in association. Orndorff, Snuka, Tony Atlas, Muraco, and Mr. Fuji would draw in all this money, but Vince Jr. put the WWF label on everything and gave the Federation the credit instead of the wrestlers. In his eyes now, his company product was selling out buildings all over and not the individuals who were wrestling in the events. Guys like Macho Man were coming up at that time with Elizabeth, and McMahon was on a roll, so he figured he wasn't going to need the veterans around much longer. He was quickly trying to get rid of the old school and get new guys in so he could control them and pay them less money. This battle was taking the strength away from all the other wrestlers. But McMahon wanted to be in control of everything and everyone involved in his Federation. He even tried to control where some of us lived.

During this time I was trying to decide on a permanent residence for my family. Vince McMahon had my wife and me picked up in a limousine with a real estate agent, and basically said that he'd buy us any house we wanted in Connecticut as long as I agreed to live there year-round.

I met with my wife privately in our hotel room to discuss the free house deal, and she said that she was going to say no to Vince. I said, "Kitty, this is a free house!" She said, "But Roderick, our children won't stand a chance here." I even offered to put guards around every inch of the house, but she wasn't buying into any of it. Well, the old story of the battle of the sexes came into play, and I learned then to never fight with a woman, there ain't no possible way to win.

We ended up buying a ranch on a mountain in Oregon, which caused me to have a 3,500-mile commute to work. Kitty is the Mother of the Millennium, but the jet lag and road crust certainly didn't make me Father of the Year!

This definitely hurt my relationship with Vince, but I had to do what I had to do for my family. It was just our personal choice. We were just thinking in terms of what was best for our family and not what was best for Vince and the WWF. As Don Johnson once told me, "It's not getting to the top that's hard, it's staying there." Man, was he ever right.

10

WrestleMania 2 and III

I suppose if I could ever take a match back it would be the one I had at *WrestleMania* 2 in 1986. It wasn't even a wrestling match! For some reason, Vince McMahon asked me if I would box Mr. T. Honestly, I really didn't like Mr. T. So being up-front, I told Vince that there was no way that I would take a dive for the star of *The A-Team* and he assured me that I wouldn't have to. Satisfied, I agreed and the match was booked as one of the top matches for the Federation's premier event of the year.

In preparation, McMahon sent me to a boxing camp in Reno, Nevada, run by legendary trainer Lou Duva. Also at the camp were boxing stars Evander Holyfield, Leon Spinks, Dwight Braxton, and Tyrell Biggs (who was just getting ready to fight Mike Tyson). So here I am, a wrestler, and I'm in this camp with these guys, trying to get in shape for a boxing match. Overnight, McMahon wanted me to go from the road, where I was tired as a dog and downing beers like they were going out of style, to a place where they get up at 4 A.M. to run five miles. I went from drinking luxurious bottles of Miller Lite with my Frat Brothers to running in the park with ducks and these high-caliber boxers—all of a sudden I was asked to be Carl Lewis. I wasn't in shape for this. I hadn't been doing any roadwork for years; I was too busy wrestling, and on top of all that my hip was killing me. But Duva didn't mess around in these camps. He had us sparring, hitting the bag . . . all that fun stuff. I have to admit I was getting in better shape, but I was also getting the dog beat out of me by these guys.

But while I was there I made the best of the situation. I became pretty good friends with Evander Holyfield. At the beginning of camp there was a card and Duva was introducing all the boxers to everyone and they were all getting a nice round of applause. But when he got to me the cheers turned to rising unbelievable boos. I responded to the jeers by putting my arm around Holyfield, who was standing right next to me. I grabbed the mike and said, "You're all just jealous because you had to pay to come here to see us and we got in for free." Holyfield didn't know how to react to my statement and he just politely said, "Ah, jeez, Mr. Piper, please don't do that."

Even though I was out of my element for four weeks, I learned an awful lot from Duva and the boys. I came back in better shape and better prepared for my match against Mr. T.

But even though I learned the ropes from Duva about boxing, I should have known that I'd regret my decision to box Mr. T. For practice before our bout, I was brought in to go a few rounds with him in a ring set up in a warehouse. Vince McMahon and the booker George Scott were also there. This was the only contact in the ring I had with Mr. T prior to the match. We started fisticuffing a bit, and I had his head under my arm in a "guillotine" position. I wanted very much to "shoot" with Mr. T then, but neither Scott nor McMahon was giving me a clear high sign. I was working under the rules that any problem you had to take care of, you take care of it in the dressing room. When you're out in front of the camera or a live audience, it is always strictly professional.

There was a lot of talk about what was really going to happen in this particular match, especially after I had vented my feelings about Mr. T. I was not overbearing, but I was as obnoxious, rude, and egotistical as a person could get. I cared for no one, and I thought no one cared for me.

The match was going to take place at the Nassau Coliseum in New York, and it had sold out within a few hours. It was part of a card that was taking place in three different locations—a first in wrestling history. *WrestleMania 2* was also being beamed by satellite from the Rosemont Horizon in Chicago, with wrestlers like Andre the Giant and Big John Studd against some of the Chicago Bears in a battle royal, and Hogan was going to be in Los Angeles at the L.A. Sports Arena facing King Kong Bundy in a steel-cage match.

Before *WrestleMania 2,* I had gotten into some trouble in Phoenix because of some things I had said about Mr. T during a press conference before a match on a *Saturday Night Main Event.* I had been living pretty hard before this incident. I hadn't slept in three days. There was quite a bit of drinking going on because I was so tired of being on the road away from my family that I was getting to the point where nothing mattered anymore. I arrived in Arizona that evening and made my way over to the conference, which was held in a large room that was filled with people I had never seen before. In one corner there was McMahon, in another there were press people from NBC, and in a third corner were trainers who I didn't recognize. It was a very odd atmosphere.

But I didn't care. Here I came barreling in and everyone's asking what's going to happen to Mr. T on the TV that night and I answered them, "Simple. I'm going to take my waist belt off my kilt and I'm going to whip him like a slave." I was so aggressive that day and no one was saying anything, not even McMahon.

Sure enough, that night on NBC I got Mr. T down and I took the waist belt off my kilt and I whipped him. This was also where I pushed the envelope. I said that slavery was a terrible thing and I was glad that they had ended it, but I also said that it made me wonder why one of the first things that Mr. T did when slavery ended was to put chains around his neck. Well, that sure got a lot of raw attention, and it's safe to say that not everyone was a big Roddy Piper fan after that night in Phoenix.

But I wasn't done yet.

After the match, I came into the hotel lobby carrying my Halliburton, and there was Vince McMahon and his entourage and the booker George Scott. At that time my relationship with Vince McMahon was beginning to wear a bit thin. I was very much a believer that you are your own man, and as such, I should dictate how I got to the outcome of a match. Vince, however, was trying to turn wrestling into sports-entertainment, which was dead against everything that I had been taught. Well, Scott and I didn't really get along and tensions were rising when we saw each other and I kind of bumped him, so he took his finger and put it in my mouth to kind of hook my cheek. We were very close to "ribbing on the square" here. It was real close to rock and roll. But when he put his finger in my mouth, I bit down hard on his finger, managing to hang on to my Halliburton, and I walked him all around the lobby in a circle back to the elevators, where McMahon and his entourage were trying to get on.

At that time I let Scott go and put my Halliburton down. When the doors opened, Scott got on the elevator with Vince and his crowd, but every time the doors went to close, I bumped 'em open and said, "Come on, you motherfuckers!" I was challenging them all and they didn't know what to do. Finally one of McMahon's producers ran out of the elevator when he saw another elevator open, and he grabbed my Halliburton and put it in that elevator. I had no choice but to let them go as I raced to the second elevator to grab my case before the door closed. I had been pushed so hard at that point I was just out of my head.

Also during this time, just before *WM2*, these guys had me doing whatever they wanted. They never thought, "Hot Rod will never do it." They just assumed I would.

One day I asked where we were going, and they said, "We're going to Philadelphia. We're going to see Joe Frazier. You're going to go into his gym and challenge him." I said, "Does Joe know that we're coming?" They told me no, but that they'd call him when we got down there. So we get to Philadelphia to Joe Frazier's gym—mind you, we're not in the best part of town—and I walk in wearing my kilt and the whole nine yards for this publicity bit. All these boxers turn to look at me and wonder what the heck is going on. I yell, "Where is Joe Frazier, I've come to kick his ass!" All of a sudden you see Joe standing in the doorway of his office, which was above the ring. He stood in the doorway—*the whole doorway*—and he says, "I'm Joe Frazier." I'm now thinking, "Oh shit, I'm gonna die!"

He comes down and he's carrying this medicine ball in his hands. I immediately put my hands behind my back and tell him, "Go ahead, Joe, give your best shot." Joe then takes the medicine ball and whips it into my belly. I then, meant to say, "Go ahead, Joe, do it again!" But in reality it kind of came out like, "G-g-go a-a-head, J-Joe, da-da-do it again," as I had nearly all my wind knocked out of me. So Joe winds up and—*boom!*—fires that thing again. Well, again, in my mind the words sounded a lot different than how they actually came out. In my head I was saying, "See, I ain't afraid of nobody; I can take anything," but I could barely get the words out of my mouth in a whisper, as Joe's last blast surely not only hurt like a motherfucker, but it also left me gasping for air. Now I know Joe's real name—Mr. Frazier.

WRESTLEMANIA 2

Finally, the match was about to begin and I exuded confidence. By my side I had the great Lou Duva, for whom I have all the respect and love in the world. He had a plaid robe made for me that said

HOT ROD on the back. Also with us was his right-hand man, George Benton, one of the greatest trainers in the world. Together, they taught me little tricks—like laying your right hand on your chest so you don't get tired—professional secrets. Wearing my plaid robe, I got into the ring, and Joan Rivers, who was a special guest announcer for the event, said to me: "Why do you always act so mean?" Well, in the middle of Nassau Coliseum and in front of seventeen thousand people, with my match about to start, I really didn't want to get into it with Joan Rivers!

I was now pumped for the match. It was no secret how much I hated Mr. T. Even the wrestlers were curious to see how the match was going to turn out. They were betting among themselves, saying things like, "I bet you Piper takes him out in the first round," "I bet you Piper takes him out in the second round," and so forth. The wrestlers themselves are figuring pretty much that Roddy Piper is going to shoot that night. But as I said, the rule was business in front of the camera is business and you take care of personal problems backstage. I was still looking for any kind of high sign from McMahon that I was going to be allowed to take this guy out, but I wasn't getting any.

Just before the bell rang I realized that I had forgotten my mouthpiece. Luckily, Lou Duva thought quickly and improvised, getting some gauze and sticking it up in between my teeth. It was a poor man's mouthpiece, for sure, but I didn't let it affect my confidence.

Throughout the first round people were cheering for Mr. T and booing the dog out of me. At the beginning of the match, having been blessed all my life with fairly fast hands, I threw a few left jabs that caught Mr. T. He then countered with a combination of his own that caught me, but I kept coming at him with lefts and rights. While I was outboxing Mr. T, I really wasn't hurting him. You see, when they put my gloves on, I had to roll my fists so that my hands weren't in the actual glove. Meaning, when I hit Mr. T, only the glove was hitting him, not my fist. But the same rule didn't apply to T; he had his gloves on the right way. To make things more infuriating, the commentators, Susan St. James and Vince, were terrible. Susan was tossing out really dry comments, not lending anything to the telecast. She was just making a bad situation worse.

In the second round they gave me a mouthpiece and things began to look up . . . so I thought. At about the middle of the round, the crowd started chanting my name. It came very slowly and from the bowels of the building and built up until it consumed the whole arena. The crowd was now behind me 100 percent, and at this time Mr. T and I came to a predetermined spot in the ring where I was going to let him knock me down with a left hook. I knew he was going to throw the left and I would have to fall out of the ring, but I had a slight problem—I was trying to figure out how I was going to get from the ring, through the ropes, and onto the concrete floor five feet below us. I couldn't grab the ropes to break my fall because I had no thumbs on my gloves. Anyway, as this was going through my mind, he threw the punch and *bang,* I fly! The only problem was, as my luck would have it, he missed! But I had no idea. Sometimes you can't feel punches after a while, and nobody had ever missed me before, so I wasn't sure. Mr. T wasn't a professional, and it showed. I had been working with pros all my life—not amateurs like T—and I take full responsibility for what happened. As a pro, I should've known better. I was told later on that he missed me by a good eight inches. The people at the Nassau Coliseum, like me, didn't know what had just happened, but the people sitting at home sure knew. The camera angle made it really evident that he had missed me by a mile. It was the most humiliating thing that could have happened to me considering the stature and reputation that I had in my sport.

Even though I wasn't aware of the miss, I was still terribly angry in the ring and wanted to take this guy out so bad. The plan for the third round was for me to knock Mr. T down two times. I got on him immediately and he went down once. After he got up I went back after him, but he never went down a second time. He let the round run out without taking another fall. Now I was furious!

I went back to my corner and my ring crew told me to sit down, but I wasn't ready to sit. I was so frustrated that I just picked up my stool and flung it as hard as I could at Mr. T, taking a chunk out of his leg. I thought maybe it would provoke him to take a shot at me, which would justify me in "shooting" with him so I could take him out. But he never did.

I wound up losing the match via disqualification after body-slamming him in sheer frustration. I consider this match to be a black mark in my career, all because Mr. T didn't have the experience to make the key punch connect. The match was a really good slap in the face for me because my head and ego were too big at the time, but I also should have trusted my instincts and knocked him out when I wanted to. You see, he didn't follow the rules. The rules say that it's better to knock your opponent's teeth down his throat than to hit him with a popcorn punch.

But that match also marked a turning point in my career. The entire Nassau Coliseum had changed in one and half rounds from cheering for Mr. T to chanting "Piper! Piper! Piper!" This started a huge wave of fan support that quickly led to me becoming the fan favorite. All of a sudden Vince McMahon didn't know what to do, as his top heel had turned into his top babyface. Now "Rowdy" Roddy Piper was even more popular than Hulk Hogan!

It became a real fight with the powers that be from then on. With my star status full-blown at this time, Hogan told me that he had gone to Vince and said that he would just ride on my kilts, if you will, in an attempt to keep within the moral code. But he was also trying to test his position with McMahon, and the WWF boss told him not to worry about it, that he would take care of the situation. Thus the battle began between Roddy Piper and Vince McMahon. If you didn't take care of yourself, you would get beaten, and McMahon was definitely trying to suppress me.

The amount of animosity was unparalleled. I was doing my part, living up to everything that they said I was. But I was also taking care of my duties. During this period of time I was still doing "Piper's Pit," and Kitty and I had our second child—another beautiful little girl—Ariel, my swan. I was managing to maintain the struggle. There was talk about me fighting Mike Tyson in a five-round exhibition match in New York for the reopening of the renovated Statue of Liberty. I would have done it, but it just never happened.

ELECTROCUTION

As if putting my life on the line inside the ring wasn't enough, I had some encounters outside the squared circle that almost cost me my life. Right before *WrestleMania III,* I was wrestling on a card in L.A. at the Sports Arena. This particular night I happened to be on last, and after my match I was hanging out with Harley Race, Mitch Ackerman (a dear friend of mine), and some other folks, I just can't remember who right now—which you will understand in a second. Well, we were just kind of shooting the breeze in the dressing room, mostly waiting for the crowd to leave so we could get out of the building and avoid the traffic jam.

The way the dressing rooms were set up, you got changed in one room and then went to another room to shower and then you came back to dry off and get dressed. Also, in this dressing room, they had many makeup mirrors, which had the big lightbulb lights around them, just like you see actors and actresses use in the movies. Well, as I was talking to the guys, I put my towel on top of my Halliburton, which was sitting on the top shelf near one of these lights. I stripped down into my birthday suit, and went to the other room to shower, forgetting to take my towel with me.

When I was done showering, I went back into the dressing room soaking wet, in search of my towel. Leaving a pool of water beneath me, I reached for my towel next to my case and I began talking to Harley. The next thing I knew, I slipped on the water that was dripping off my wet, naked body and fell toward the mirror. In the process of slipping on the drenched floor, my left index finger accidentally went into one of the empty bulb sockets, causing me to get electrocuted.

This blew me back three feet into my chair, and everybody looked at me like, "What is Piper doing now?" (Nobody had any idea what had just happened.) The wrestlers couldn't put two and two together, and even when they did, they usually came out with three! Finally, after a little foaming from my mouth, they thought maybe they should ask me if I was okay. By this time in my career, I had been taught to show no pain. No retreat, no surrender was my creed. As everyone left the dressing room and I started getting dressed, my good friend Mitch and I went to a sushi bar. However, as the night progressed, I got more confused and nauseous, at which time I asked my friend if he would take me back to my hotel room.

Okay, folks, I get a little murky here. I don't know how, but I had a plane ticket for Minneapolis the next morning, and somehow I got on a plane that took me to Kansas City. I got off the plane in Kansas City, and I had been there enough to know that you stay at the "Marri-rott" by the KC airport. Being a creature of habit, I headed for the "Marri-rott," thinking I had a room there. I began to walk the halls on every floor until security came and said, "Mr. Piper, can I help you?" I said, "Yeah. Could you tell me where the hell I am?" From this point on, it was basically "get him to the hospital." It turned out that I had taken quite a jolt from the electricity and was sent home to Portland.

To this day the only thing I want to give myself credit for is that the L.A. Sports Arena was remodeled entirely to protect the athletes, as I sued their ass and won. I kept calling my wife, the WWF office, and everyone from the hospital to figure out where I was supposed to be after I got electrocuted, and kept insisting to the doctors, nurses, and wrestlers who I was talking to that I had to be in Norfolk. As rough as wrestlers could be at times on one another, they knew something was wrong with me, especially since we hadn't been in Norfolk in ten years! After many tests and exams in the hospital and my retaining a very good lawyer named Carol Freis out of L.A., I was able to take on and beat the L.A. Sports Arena and their dangerous working conditions.

WRESTLEMANIA III

At the time of *WrestleMania III* I had been fighting against the establishment that wanted to diminish my real estate value as a professional wrestler, and I knew I couldn't keep fighting them forever. So I devised a plan.

The only way I could keep my real estate value and stay on top was if I retired. I figured if I retired at the peak of my career and went into another industry and had success, it would prevent the WWF from pushing me down and diminishing my value in the sport. I must admit it was a pretty scary, ballsy move, but I decided to go ahead with it.

Early in 1987, I told Vince McMahon that I didn't want to do "Piper's Pit" anymore because I thought it was getting old, never letting him know what I was up to. Plus, I've always believed that you should always quit just before the clapping reaches its peak. That way it will always give you another run. Vince didn't want me to end the show, but I let him know that my match at *WrestleMania III* was going to be my retirement match.

The card was to take place at the Pontiac Silverdome, with the main event being Hulk Hogan vs. Andre the Giant for the world title. When Vince McMahon made the posters for *WrestleMania III*, they read ANDRE THE GIANT VS. HULK HOGAN, and then, in small print, *Roddy Piper's Retirement Match*. He didn't want to give me any credit at all. This was Vince's way of doing as much damage to me as he could. Since I had to continue to do the "Piper's Pit" until *WMIII*, I used one segment to break the news to the public that I was retiring. In an interview, I just said, "Daddy's coming home."

After the good-bye speech, Don Muraco came out horse-laughing and said, "Thanks, you just killed off every babyface in the territory." But before I went on that night, Vince kept hounding me to find out what I was going to do. Finally I told him, "Vince, just let me go out there," and he backed off.

I guess he must have been worried about what I was going to say, but I did the right thing. I put the WWF in its right perspective by thanking it. As much as I may have differences with the WWF, I did do great things for the WWF and the WWF did great things for me. However, it was war and I was determined to survive.

The setup for the main event was done on "Piper's Pit." Hogan and Andre were doing the interview, and Andre was supposed to rip off the cross Hulk was wearing. Well, I had a problem with this, as I will not use the Lord's name in vain, and this seemed to go against that belief. It was a very confusing time for me, morally and professionally. As the interview progressed, Andre finally reached over and ripped the cross off Hogan, and as he did this, his nails clawed the Hulkster and there was a little bit of blood. And just before we went off the air, I said to Hogan, "You're bleeding!" It was perfect timing, and this added element really made the angle pop!

There was a record crowd of ninety-three thousand people on hand that night in the Pontiac Silverdome and one of them was a movie director named John Carpenter. I had never heard of him, but my friend Dave Wolff said Carpenter wanted to meet me and talk to me. So I agreed to meet him afterward. Hey, a free dinner is a free dinner. I really didn't think much about it at the time.

Throughout *WrestleMania III* there was an electric cart shaped like a miniature wrestling ring that transported the competing wrestlers to the actual ring. When it was my turn to go out, they were having problems with the cart; something was broken and I could hear the crowd. I knew the time was now, but Vince kept telling me to wait, that they'd fix the cart. But I said, "Fuck it!" I opened the curtain and just started running down the aisle. I don't know if it was a combination of the fans thinking that it was the last time they were going to see me or the fact that I was running into the ring, but they went nuts. I didn't need no stinking cart to go into the ring. If I couldn't run into the ring, what business did I have being in there as a fighter? When I got into that ring the people in that arena gave me a sensation that I'll never forget in my whole life. You can look back at that tape; nobody got a bigger response than me. Even the ringside announcers, Gorilla Monsoon and Bobby Heenan, couldn't hear each other, as the cheering was so deafening. That moment was almost worth all the broken bones and bad trips . . . that was one moment when I changed out of my normal MO and I looked around that arena with sincerity—looking at all those people who had basically saved my ass and gotten me into a position where I could earn a good living and have a half-decent life.

This was an incredible time in my career. In came Adrian Adonis (a.k.a. Keith Frankie)—I loved this guy—along with his manager, Jimmy Hart. My very good friend was set to take me on in my last hurrah and we had an entertaining match. It was a hair vs. hair match and the loser of the match had to get his hair cut. Adrian lost the match, and that is how Brutus the Barber was born. It was just an improv by me. I had already beaten Adrian and was having some fun with it since the people were going crazy. It was a great moment and I just said to Brutus, "You cut his hair." I handed him the big shears I had been given and he cut his hair and thus became Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake.

The whole atmosphere of *WrestleMania III* was incredible. I didn't get another reception like that until I went overseas to wrestle. And I must admit that for my retirement match, McMahon put on the best presentation I have seen. They played Frank Sinatra's song "My Way" and showed highlights of my career, and at the end of the video, they showed me wearing a Hulk Hogan T-shirt in *The War to Settle the Score* and saying "I love you." This came off looking like I was endorsing Hulk Hogan! Of course I had to call

Vince later about it, and he just started laughing! He was, and is, a very calculating and cunning man.

After the match Dave Wolff was waiting to escort me back to my dressing room. When Vince saw the two of us together, I could tell that he didn't like it. This created animosity between us and quite frankly was the beginning of the end of our relationship. You see, folks, I am just trying to give you the temperature and atmosphere at the time between Vince and me.

After the amazing event, I kicked back and had dinner with John Carpenter and people were sending me bottles of Cristal champagne. I could feel the tears in their eyes as I made mimosas with it. As we were having dinner, Carpenter offered me the lead in his next film, *They Live*. It was as simple as that, folks. We were eating dinner, John Carpenter said, "Would you pass me the butter, please?" Dave said, "Would you pass me a roll, please?" Carpenter said, "Would you like to star in my next movie?" I said, "Sure, are there any more of those rolls left?" And we never talked another word about the movie that night. However, don't let me fool you folks into thinking I was just naive because I had big black wings by that time and was very hard to fool.

I knew that McMahon was trying to bury me, and like I said before, I needed to make a dramatic move to increase my real estate value. So I gave my word to do the movie without even knowing what it was about. When McMahon found out about the deal, he came up to me and said, "I will have you a movie within four weeks that pays the same amount if you stay." I said, "Not with John Carpenter directing it," since I knew what McMahon was up to. Let me be real honest with you folks, I didn't need another *Hell Comes to Frog Town* (I still to this day claim that it was my evil twin brother who did that movie), which was what McMahon probably would have gotten me. I just left Vince and the WWF behind, and the next thing I knew I was in John Carpenter's backyard, taking acting lessons and making the movie with the hard knocks of wrestling behind me.

Just about the time *They Live* came out in 1988 and was the number one box-office hit its first weekend in the theaters, I needed to communicate with McMahon about my dilemma with the electrocution court case. During his communication with Freis (my lawyer), McMahon sent a message to me: "You tell Piper that Hogan and I are the only true-blue WWFers." Until that time Hogan and I were known to the promotion as the franchise.

But after *WMIII,* McMahon made it clear that I was not part of the family anymore. What he did not realize is that I have never had a family other than the beautiful one I have created myself through God's help. McMahon told me, "The WWF doesn't need Roddy Piper." I then looked him in the eye and said, "Roddy Piper doesn't need the WWF," and I proceeded to go on to get a number one hit movie, the first wrestler in history to accomplish this feat. I knew McMahon was dead wrong because all of the education I had been given by the old-timers showed me that even if I went out and got a number one movie, I could come back to the WWF and still be untouchable. And I did come back to do voice-overs as well as wrestle. But, folks, as the stakes rise, so does the psychology.

11

The Grand Jury

IF you are a longtime wrestling fan, you've no doubt heard about the "steroid scandal." The allegation was that Vince McMahon was not only condoning steroid use by his WWF wrestlers, but was *encouraging* us to take them to become better at our jobs. I will tell you now that this is 100 percent not true! Kind of.

However, I can also say that I don't think Vince lost any sleep over it. McMahon wasn't worried about it because he knew what he had to do to keep his nose clean. The way he saw it, the answer was easy. His thought process probably went something like this: "Hogan lives next door to me, Hogan is my friend, Hogan makes money for me. Roddy Piper is the other half of my franchise and is drawing as much money as Hogan. However, Piper won't come to my office and talk to me. Piper is a rebel. His wife refused a free house from me. Piper is the other half of my franchise and is drawing as much money as Hogan. Piper is three thousand miles away, and he is known to turn on a dime. Hmm . . . someone has to go down.

Which one should I take down? I definitely don't want it to be me, because I like me the best. The answer is clearly Piper."

The first I heard about the whole mess was one morning when I woke up and flipped on the TV to get caught up on what was happening in the world. The first image I saw was of me with Hulk Hogan on CNN's *Headline News*. It aired every thirty minutes for the entire day. It was like a never-ending case of jock itch. You knew you had it, but it wouldn't go away until it was ready. As the hours progressed, it got pretty damn irritating. This was the kickoff of the famous steroid scandal. And it all started in the pleasant town of Hershey, Pennsylvania, with a doctor named George Zahorian.

Immediately, I thought it was all Hogan's fault because he looked so good. Obviously taking steroids is the complete opposite of my philosophy, because I don't have *any* muscles compared with Hogan. What I do have is a big pair of balls, as you will soon find out.

Hershey, Pennsylvania, was one of the wrestlers' favorite vacation stops. To hell with the Oscars! To hell with meeting the president! To hell with Disneyland! If you asked a wrestler where he was going after a particularly difficult match, he would jump up and cheer, "I'm going to Hershey, PA!" (Well, to see Dr. Zahorian, of course.) The doc was an extremely nice and very popular urologist who would supply various drugs to the wrestlers. At the time Dr. Zahorian had been appointed by the Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission to be the attending physician for the WWF. I really believe that in the beginning he had a lot of compassion for us. We were shuttled around the country for fifty-two weeks a year and brought out to perform like circus animals by the promoters. The doc would FedEx several different drugs to any location to help the boys if they were in physical or emotional pain (the two going hand in hand in our business!). Eventually he became so successful from supplying these drugs to the wrestlers that he bought himself a new chocolate-brown Mercedes and got his own preferred parking place by the door of the Hershey Arena.

After calling ahead with your list of maladies, you would go to his office in the arena and pick up your "prescription." You would find a brown shopping bag with your name neatly lettered in Magic Marker on the side filled with whatever you needed. On any given day, the wrestler traffic coming out of this building made it look like double-coupon day at Winn-Dixie.

Zahorian, however, made a huge mistake. He decided to expand his services to include a power lifter who was selling steroids to high-school football players. To get himself "in" with the power lifters, the doc used a bit of celebrity star power. "Oh yeah, two of my best clients are Roddy Piper and Hulk Hogan," he would say a lot to his prospective buyers. "Piper and Hogan" became his litany. It wasn't long before the FBI got wind of the situation and decided to act on it. The feds started watching him and even tapped his phone.

I didn't know what to do except sit tight and wait to see what would happen. The doc called me one afternoon and asked, "Have you heard anything in the wind about the FBI?" I told him that I had not. He said, "If you do, will you let me know?" I said I would, but it was too late. The investigation was already well under way.

The FBI began attempting to serve warrants to all of the alleged offending parties. I was no exception. An FBI agent had actually climbed over the security fence at my ranch in Oregon to try to serve me. He didn't get to me, but he did get to meet my Great Dane, Hagar. As soon as Hagar spotted the fed, he was after him. I can only imagine the look on the poor guy's face as he ran for his life with my growling beast zeroing in on his ass. From what the agent later said, he'd got bitten quite hard on the buns. I wasn't in town at the time, and only found out about it later, when the warrant was deemed improperly served and the agent had to inform the court why.

I was dodging the servers to the best of my ability. Zigzagging across the country to wrestle in matches made it pretty easy, and in my partially clear mind, I was innocent of any wrongdoing. (Yeah, just like everyone in Sing Sing. Denial is a beautiful river in Egypt.)

I wasn't hurting anyone. I was just doing what I had to do to get to the next town so I could earn a living. I never made a moral judgment whether my taking drugs from the doctor was a legal thing or not. I wasn't selling them or anything like that, nor was any other wrestler. We were just putting them in our suitcases and using them. In our minds we weren't hurting anybody, we were just trying to survive. We live in a different world.

Eventually I went home and around two o'clock one afternoon I picked up the phone and called a friend. We talked and decided to meet at the local gym and work out. We both arrived about twenty-five minutes later . . . just in time to meet the FBI. They had tapped my phone and tagged me at last.

While awaiting the date for my questioning, I discovered that Hogan was no longer in the hot seat. In fact, his name had been dismissed from the investigation altogether. Zahorian was after all, a urologist and Hogan had been seeing him for a urinary condition, so he had a legitimate reason for his visits to the Doc. He was off the hook, but the good doctor was heard bragging about another famous wrestling client, so guess who was left holding the brown paper bag? RODDY PIPER, the name spelled out neatly in black Magic Marker, was now plastered worldwide on TV and in the newspapers.

Back at work in the WWF, I was doing voiceovers in the booth with Vince. During a closed-mike moment I turned and confronted him. "Hogan's out, why is this left hanging on me? What are you trying to do, set me up?" Vince pretended to get angry and turned on his intimidation tactics, saying, "How could you ever think I would set you up?" In three words I can tell you how that ended: it didn't work. I explained to Vince that all my life I'd been a lone wolf and that I'd always gotten my hands up whether I was going into the ring or not. Vince became angry at my response and didn't know what to say, so he just left the booth.

The first place where they demanded my presence was in good old Harrisburg, PA. The grand jury was meeting to decide whether or not to indict and whom. It was as casual as any function attended by police, attorneys, district attorney, and county sheriffs (who were very friendly and even gave me a hat) could be. I had never been to a grand jury investigation before, but I had been in front of ninety-three thousand fans in the Pontiac Silverdome, eighty thousand in Wembley Stadium in London, and I don't know how many millions from live house shows to Pay-Per-Views. So walking into a room with thirty people wasn't intimidating for me. I'm used to performing every day of my life.

I sat down and there was this young DA and a jury of thirty people. The lawyer asked me my Christian name and then proceeded to question me. He asked me, "What do you know about Dr. Zahorian?" He waited.

"Well, I know he's a doctor," I responded.

"Is he your doctor?" he asked.

"Not my personal one. I think he has many patients, but I'm not sure, sir," I answered calmly.

Now, picture me in a steel chair, leaning back with my hands behind my head, looking at this lawyer and thirty other people. I had no fear whatsoever. My calmness just pissed this hotshot lawyer off and he went in for the kill. So he wound up to deliver the big question, the one that was supposed to put me in my place. Here it comes, folks, hang on to your chairs, are you ready? "*What do you know about bitch tits?*"

I just started howling. "Bitch tits?" I laughed. "Bitch tits?"

The rest of the room broke out into hysterics. The young district attorney turned beet red and quickly concluded his questions.

By the way, "bitch tits" refers to the sort of breasts that some guys get from taking steroids. I found this out later. I'd seen them, but never heard them referred to in quite that way.

When order was restored in the courtroom, the jury decided there was enough evidence against Zahorian to go to trial, and the next thing I knew, I was offered immunity to testify at the trial. Why were they offering me immunity? I hadn't done anything wrong. Not only that, but Vince also offered a private plane to take me to the trial.

My lawyer (or should I say Vince's) got me the immunity and immediately I was wary of what was going down. You can't fool Piper, a street-smart animal. I believe God made me sleep on the streets for a reason. Believe me, it has saved my life many times. To ensure my security, I started devising my own plan of action just in case Vince's lawyer was lying to me about my having immunity.

The night before I was to testify at the trial, I arrived at a small venue in Pennsylvania for a scheduled show and Vince sent instructions for me to take a dive. This wasn't some scripted end to an ongoing feud. This was a house show in a small town. Something was up, and Roddy doesn't play like that.

I was scheduled to wrestle The Undertaker. The crowd was going wild and hanging from the rafters. Okay, they weren't exactly wild and they weren't hanging from any rafters either, but it's my book! They were digging it, anyway. When the ten-minute mark came, I whispered to my opponent, "Pull the mats on the floor back and pile-drive me onto the cement." "Sure," he said amicably. When you take a pile driver, unfortunately, the deeper you put your head into the other guy's crotch, the less it hurts. (Some wrestlers enjoy this immensely.) As The Undertaker was coming down, I pushed my head down to his knees so my head would hit the concrete and I would split my noggin wide open. The plan worked to perfection.

I was known for being able to take a hit—and hard—so The Undertaker didn't pay any attention. I was prone on the floor and the ref was counting. "One, two, three . . ." I didn't get up. I didn't even move. The Undertaker was swaggering around and finally hopped out of the ring to stop the count. I still didn't get up. He hopped back in and the count started again. "Six, seven, eight . . ." I might as well have been comatose.

Finally, I was counted out. I heard someone yelling for an ambulance while three or four guys dragged me behind the curtain where the medics were. I started fighting them, not hitting or throwing punches but just pushing them away. I plunked down onto the nearest metal folding chair and began to foam at the mouth, with spit flying into the air and my eyes rolling back in my head. One of the medics kept trying to look into my eyes. "Roddy, can you hear me, are you all right?" he asked. I shook my head and looked calmly at him. "Yeah, I'm fine, why?" Then I slipped right back into my delirium. I wouldn't sit still for them to take my blood pressure and my arms were flopping all over the place.

René Goulet is a former wrestler who was a road agent at the time and had been a friend of mine for many years. I gave him the high sign and said to him in Carney to get me into the car. René and the other guys managed to get me outside and into the car to take me to McMahon's private plane, which would fly me to Harrisburg. My seizures continued. I would jerk and twitch and then appear normal as the car sped to the airport.

When we arrived, I tried to get out of the car with help from the footboard. I leaned out and pushed myself up with my foot, balanced for a moment, and then fell flat on my face onto the ground, foaming and shaking. They finally got me in the plane and René grabbed the phone. He made a call and I heard him insisting that he be connected to Vince. As soon as René had him on the line, he handed me the phone.

"Rod, it's Vince. Are you all right, man? Can you hear me? Are you okay?"

I smiled to myself. "Vince," I said quietly, "I'm a box of fluffy ducks and no one sets me up, not even you!" And I hung up.

The plane took off, and during the ride I had two rather glorious seizures. During the second one I inadvertently managed to kick a control-panel gadget that caused a small *ping*, and the plane dipped low for a second, causing the pilot to panic. I decided that, perhaps, I had completed the seizure portion of my airplane trip and settled back quietly into my seat.

When the plane landed and I disembarked, I fell on my face again, crawling around on all fours. They half dragged, half carried me to the waiting car. Things continued much the same on the way to the hotel and I wondered how Vince's posse still had the energy to restrain me. I was exhausted myself.

I staggered out of the car into the hotel lobby supported by two men. Perfectly groomed and standing at attention at the front desk waiting for me was Vince's lawyer. One more seizure, and it was probably my best. I held my breath and my face turned from a nice deep psychotic red to a deathly white. The lawyer looked at me in the arms of these guys and asked them if I was going to come around. I came to, stood up straight, and said, "I'm fine, why would you say something like that?"

Then I collapsed again and was carried into the elevator and rushed into a hotel suite. I had one more seizure in the room before they got me into bed. The lawyer rushed to the side of the bed and said, "Roddy, you do not have to testify tomorrow. It's obvious you are in no condition to be moved." I said, "Listen, I'm a man and I'll be there." John Wayne would have been proud of me. As soon as they tucked me into bed (probably saying a silent prayer that I would make it through the night) and left, I cracked open the minibar and had myself a beer.

By now you folks must be wondering why all of this bullshit—the seizures, etc.—went on. Well, in all honesty, my options for self-defense were limited, so I had come up with a plan. I figured if I said something stupid at the upcoming trial, I could always follow it up with, "What trial? I don't remember the last three days." This was actually pretty close to the truth, because to be honest, I could barely remember the last three months.

The next morning they checked on me. I was groaning pathetically but bravely said, "I just want to get this over with, gentlemen." The lawyer and some FBI agents came to accompany me. They were nice enough to take me into the courthouse by way of the back door to avoid the press. Actually, they were probably scared to be seen with me. I must have looked like shit.

I was first taken by my lawyer into the DA's office, which was packed with tons of evidence, namely steroids. When I look back on it, they must have been trying to intimidate me. But, gentle readers, you must understand something: I had been on the road twenty years by this time and was currently at the end of a forty-day run. When you get that tired and you're that tough, you just don't care—especially if you have been wrestling the stallion Paul Orndorff for the last forty fucking days!

As we were sitting there, my (Vince's) lawyer said something derogatory to me, and I came back at him with an equally rude line. He then said to me, "You got a big mouth." And I said, "Yeah, I do. That's why I get paid seven times more than you a year!" We were going back and forth at each other before the trial and I was flicking as much shit back at him as he was flicking at me. I really hit him where it hurts when I said, "How do you feel knowing that your parents paid for eighteen years of school for you to defend a wrestler who makes way more than you do? Where does that put you on the chain of life, partner?" He scurried away, angry, to have some words with the DA, but the DA didn't utter a word because he didn't want his case messed up.

One of the FBI agents indicated that it was time to "rock and roll." Another agent, who we'll call "Slim," was a tall, lanky fellow who was standing across from me trying to be intimidating. I moseyed up to him about thirty seconds before we entered the courtroom proper and said, "A lanky guy like you would probably make a hell of a wrestler. Did you know that Abe Lincoln was a lanky guy like you and he was a great wrestler? Shake hands with me for a second." I grinned my most charming movie-star grin.

I don't know why, but God gifted me with a grip from hell. I can get on a three-hundred pound machine and lift all day long. I attribute it to my carrying heavy bags through airports for twenty years. I grabbed the egotistical Slim's hand. He had forgotten that we were on our way to the courtroom and was dying to show me his handshake. He gripped me as hard as he could, and I just kept up with him. Five, four, three, two, one . . . Someone from the inside opened the courtroom door. I clamped down and pulled Slim with me five feet into the court like two dogs locked together on a front lawn. I was still shaking his hand vigorously in front of everyone and bellowed, "What a pleasure to meet you, sir. I sure do love the FBI!" That got things off to a roaring start.

I strolled on up to the bench, took my oath, and sat down. The judge was an old-timer who loved me and had been watching me forever, but that didn't do me any good. The DA approached me and began the questioning with two insignificant queries. I forget what they were, but you can look them up if you want to; it's a matter of public record.

The third question was, "How long has Dr. Zahorian been pushing steroids on you?"

I shifted my weight in the chair and stared him down. "What do you mean by 'pushing'?"

I said nothing more, and the DA retracted the question and turned away.

"I have no more questions. Your honor, I am done with this witness," he said.

After all that press and hysteria, I was dismissed. I shook my head, got out of the box, and walked over to the doc. I shook his hand and said, "Good luck to you." Then I waltzed on out of there.

According to the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* and *Jockbeat,* on June 27, 1991, Dr. Zahorian was convicted of twelve of the fourteen counts of selling anabolic steroids, painkillers, and Valium to pro wrestlers and a bodybuilder and was sentenced to three years in prison, and as a result, many wrestlers became a lot smaller. That trial started drug testing in the WWF, and for the record, I never failed a drug test. I always complied. But thanks to my court performances, Vince now had a vendetta against me. The next time I was called for a urine test, he actually had someone come in and watch me pee into the cup. You can imagine how that went over with me! No way was anyone going to watch me, and he sure as hell wasn't going to touch me, so I slammed the guy's head into a fucking wall. As he slid down to the floor, I said, "Don't come near me again or I'll piss in your mouth and you can run *that* down to the lab!"

I was immediately called into Vince's office. He was hot. "Did you slam that guy's head into the wall?" he asked. "Yeah, I did," I said. He said, "You can't do that, it's illegal!" (Since when did legal apply to the WWF?) I replied, "I just did!"

Wasn't that a laugh? Did they actually think I would agree to have Vince's men watch me pee into a cup? I ended our conversation by saying, "Let me tell you something, Vince, with all the fags you got in this company, how in the hell do I know what you have going on, Vince McMahon *Junior*. Now can I leave?"

That was probably the worst thing I could have said to Junior. And I did leave. But I did work for him for another four years and even got myself a raise. Go figure?

12

The Sickness

I don't believe this particular idea has ever been presented before. I created the term because I had to somehow identify it. The promoters in the wrestling industry would not want this made public. The wrestlers themselves aren't aware of it, even though their bodies and minds are being destroyed by it, the extent depending on the history of the individual wrestler. To begin to help you understand, I will put it in an equation: "The amount of the Sickness in the wrestler is directly proportional to the amount of manipulation used by the promoter."

I was raised in this cutthroat business, and I am proud of it. The men who raised me were not aware of the Sickness; therefore, it was never explained to me. I had to figure this one out on my own. And I did, after asking myself some questions, such as: Why did four of the Von Erich boys commit suicide? Why was Bruiser Brody stabbed to death in San Juan over a wrestling finish? Why did so many of the boys overdose? Why did we travel to an arena 250 miles one way, pay for our own transportation and food, then wrestle and go back home with less money than we started with? Why did we do this night after night and not have a clue as to the amount of money we were going to make? If you asked the promoter what the house take was, assuming you were getting a percentage, he would be evasive, lie, or not even acknowledge the question. Sometimes, depending on the stature of the promoter, he would even abolish you from his territory for asking. Yet I still made it to town after town, never missing a match. I was living and breathing wrestling and was willing to die for it!

In my early wrestling years, my home was whatever hotel I stayed in that night. It was the perfect career for a misfit who for once in his life could fit in. I depended on wrestling for boosting my confidence, making my mark in life. It gave me honor, respectability, and pride. The longer I was in wrestling, the more I depended on it. In my case, I also had a "fear nothing" attitude by which I lived. At least I thought I feared nothing. In hindsight, the truth is that I feared everything! To compensate for this hidden fear, I would go to any extreme to prove that I feared nothing. Looking back, I realize that mentally I was never out of the ring. If I was buying a Mars bar at the 7-Eleven, I did it with the "in-ring mentality." Are you confused yet? Not me, just getting a little "sicker." But soon you'll understand.

In my mind I was invincible (or should I say in-Vince-able?). One time I was in San Diego, California, and I was teamed up with Keith Frankie, a.k.a. Adrian Adonis. It was our first night there, and as we got into the ring, we saw four Mexicans blatantly waving knives at us. Adrian said, "Pipes, let's get out of here!" I said, "No, Adie, we got the high ground. I've got you covered." I strolled over to the Mexicans and sweep-kicked one of them, nailing him square in the temple, dropping him before he knew what hit him. I kicked him as hard as I could, never thinking or caring how much damage I did. The others backed off and made their way out of the ring while that guy was on his way to the hospital. I don't know how he fared, nor did I care. I was infected and he had been *affected*.

Another time, in Raleigh, North Carolina, I had just finished my match and was cooling down, still in my trunks and boots, a towel around my neck. I was standing ringside watching Ivan Koloff, a good man and a great wrestler, take on his opponent. As I stood there, I could hear a man's voice taunting me, "Hey, Piper, come on! I've got something for you, motherfucker!" I looked over and saw that about twenty-five feet away there was a black man about 220 pounds and six feet tall waving a buck knife in the air. I also noticed there were a lot of kids around him as he put on his macho display, which was full of language that would embarrass the toughest sailor. I tried to let it go and continued watching the match, but the man was relentless. And then came the clincher: "Come here, you coward! You're nothing but a phony wrestler!" Now, *that* got my attention!

I looked at him waving his buck and thought to myself that he probably didn't even know how to use a knife; anyone who did wouldn't be so obvious. The next thing I knew I was heading straight toward him with no fear, wrapping my towel around my left arm, ready to do battle. However, as I got into contact range, the man put the knife to the right side of his leg and turned a half step to his right, shielding the knife. Shit! He does know what he's doing, I realized, but it was too late. I had committed to the confrontation and was also a representative of my sport (you know, the *phony* one!).

With the towel wrapped around my left arm and my right hand free for battle, it began. The man lunged at me as I blocked with my toweled left arm and struck with my right. There we were, jousting out in the lobby of the arena in Raleigh for everyone to see. He attacked, I countered. Then, suddenly, I felt something lightly pounding me on my right side. I was focusing hard on the knife, but the pounding on my right side continued. This made me break a basic rule of knife fighting—never take your eyes off your opponent's knife! As I drew my arm up to backhand the motherfucker who was hitting me on my right, I looked and saw that it was a small black girl and I stopped my swing so I wouldn't hurt her. But with my attention diverted, my opponent literally went for the kill and stabbed me straight in the chest. The doctor told me later that I was stabbed about one inch from my heart—thisclose to bleeding to death.

Not even thinking about the seriousness of the wound, I picked up a chrome pole, much like the ones you see in a movie-theater ticket line, and went after my attacker. He started to run back into the arena stands, with me closely following, blood pumping out of my chest and a twenty-five-pound chrome pole in my hand. As I came around the corner, I literally ran into the gun barrel of one of Raleigh's finest. But it was only the blink of an eye before the police changed their focus from me to the knife-wielding man, who was now fighting with some other officers. They were holding him down and then everything seemed to go in slow motion.

The police were trying to contain the man. I could see an officer with his gun drawn and pointed at the head of the black man. He was about to pull the trigger. I watched as the hammer started to move, at which time another cop yelled and put the palm of his hand between the hammer and round, stopping him from firing. I think that was as close as anyone has ever come to getting shot without actually getting shot that I've ever seen!

Then there was chaos as I leaped onto the man, putting myself into the middle of the fray again. Smart, Rod! The police gained control, got me tied down on a gurney, and started wheeling me to an ambulance. As I was rolling along, I could hear the fans yelling, "Die, Piper! Die!" They were laughing while they flicked lit cigarette butts and spat chewing tobacco on me, thinking this was all part of the show. The fans had no idea that what they had just seen was real.

My good friend Sergeant Slaughter came to the hospital in his camouflaged limousine to see how I was doing. He waited for me as I told the doctor who was doing the stitching, "I'm going home." And just like that, I *did* go home. As a matter of fact, the next day

I wrestled twice with my chest patched. Nothing or no one was going to stop me from wrestling. By the way, the little girl who had been hitting me was the knife man's daughter. What was she thinking? It was her daddy who was attacking me with a knife. Over what? A wrestling match! What's wrong or *sick* about that picture?

Let's return to present day for a moment and take a look at Mick Foley. Now, let's get this straight. Mick has a video of himself jumping off the roof of his parents' house, fifteen feet above the ground, when he was just a teenager. This is normal behavior, correct? In the WWF, Mick took this to another level—a twenty-five-foot steel cage! Only this time Mick hurled himself onto the concrete floor. Everything is still normal so far, right? Then Mick hurled himself onto three tables, smashing them all. Don't get me wrong, Mick Foley has a world of talent, but there is no talent in doing this sort of thing. It's just plain sick and Mick loves it—as much as the promoter, and yes, the fans.

To bring it closer to home, I don't suppose that you might consider that you have a touch of the Sickness yourself and don't even know it, would you? Let me give you the litmus test. You are watching Roddy Piper on television and you're getting madder at him than at the ballot counters in Florida. So you round up Mabel and the kids and you drive twenty miles, sit in traffic, pay for parking, and buy four tickets just to see me get my ass kicked. You elbow your way through the eighteen thousand other fans, spill your five-dollar beer on the way to your seat, sit down, and get ready to watch me get my ass kicked for twenty minutes. (I know that you watched for twenty minutes because I don't go over that time. I sell wrestling, not time. Just imagine how much I get per minute!) When the match is over you gather up Mabel and the kids and drive twenty miles back home, a satisfied customer. As you lie down in your bed that night, you're happy that I got my ass kicked, and something strange happens whether you are white, red, blue, or brown in color. You completely lose your common sense. I think a doctor would diagnose this as "sick." What the hell am I talking about? I'll put it simply. You're lying in bed, $400 poorer, happy that Roddy Piper got his ass kicked. That is fine, but if someone were to ask you if wrestling was phony you wouldn't hesitate to say yes. So you are admitting that I really *didn't* get my ass kicked. Still, with the benefit of all this knowledge, you lie in bed happy that I *did* get my ass kicked! I know, I know, you're going to tell me that you went for the *entertainment*. Yeah, the entertainment of seeing me get my ass kicked! That's called sadomasochism and I do believe the doctors define that as sick behavior. In any language, in fact, it is downright sick. That's why we get along. I was full-blown sick; you just had the sniffles!

Let me give you an example of the Sickness in prime time.

The setting is Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1979. There were two young wrestlers—Ric Flair and Roddy Piper. Piper went east to wrestle Flair and won the U.S. Heavyweight Championship belt. This started the big ball of wrestling rolling as these two guys lit up the South, much like General Sherman marching through Atlanta. This was also the beginning of having"Rowdy" Roddy Piper in your living room weekly on national television, whether you liked it or not. Chances are you didn't like it at all.

One particular evening in Charlotte, I was at the height of my Sickness. I was doing a live interview, which went something like this: "Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce the U.S. Heavyweight Champion, 'Rowdy' Roddy Piper." Upon hearing my intro—*bam!*—I was on the spot. "Hi! How are you, folks? Do you know why Ric Flair dates two girls at the same time? That way, when he falls asleep they've got someone to talk to."

As I got the word "to" out of my mouth, something hit me high and something hit me low that drove me into the studio's concrete floor like a ten-penny nail. The next thing I knew, Flair had grabbed me by the hair, keeping my face down to the concrete floor. Greg Valentine picked up my legs and put them under his aromatic armpits and they both began to wheelbarrow me, or to put it simply, drag my face across the studio floor. Now remember, this is live TV.

As was to be expected, the troops arrived to pull Flair and Valentine off me. I could hear the announcer say in a frenzy, "We'll be right back, folks!" Then the hand of the Grim Reaper himself grabbed me under the armpit and said softly, "Get your fucking ass up!"

Yes, it was Gene Anderson himself. Let me take a break from my tale to tell you about this sadistic SOB whom I loved, honored, and obeyed in that order.

One day in the same studio, I was doing one of my ninety weekly interviews. I was halfway through a very hungover day, and I sat down on a chair and tried to give myself a pep talk to get over the hump. Gene Anderson saw this and, to help me along, grabbed a roll of gaffer's tape and ripped off a two-foot strip. From behind, he wrapped it around my head as tight as he could. He then proceeded to twist the tape as hard as possible, which began tearing the hair from my head.

But he wasn't dealing with "Patches" Piper. He was messing with "Rowdy" Roddy Piper, who was now full-blown Sick. Still wanting to stay in the chair, yet needing a defense, I reached over with my left hand and grabbed him by the balls. I held him like a pit bull holds a bone. As I crushed his nuts, I realized the tighter my grip, the greater my hair loss. There we were, like two rams with our horns locked. Neither one of us was going to give in. I squeezed those nuts down to the size of grapes, but that old bastard would not give up! (It's times like these that I'm thankful that there is a God.)

As the situation climaxed, a holler came from the announcer, "Piper, you're up!" At which time Gene let go and it was back to business. (Up until then, it was just for *fun*. Fun for who? I don't know?)

Okay, back to the studio with Gene's big paw pulling me up. One of the assistant directors yelled, "two fifty-four." I assumed that was the room I was going to. Gene swiftly got me out of the studio, pushing me through an open door into the lobby and into the "can"—it's where a lot of business was done—and there was Ric Flair waiting for me. Gene, with the grace of Mikhail Baryshnikov, plunked me on a toilet while kicking the door behind him closed with his left leg.

Now, I only knew one thing for sure; I was supposed to keep my mouth shut. This was hard to do as Flair yanked the side of my hair, pulling me toward him, tightening the skin on the left side of my face. As this was happening, Gene drew a piece of grade-A sandpaper from his right front pocket with the speed of Jesse James drawing his six-shooter. He then proceeded to double-fold the sandpaper and started his mission of removing the flesh from my face!

The veteran wrestler had no problem doing this, as it was a common practice in the sport. He skimmed that sandpaper over the left side of my face just like Rembrandt would his brush over a canvas, over and over again. After each swipe he would take half a step back and observe his work, and then start again. I now knew two things: emit no sound and, fuck, this hurts!

As Gene was inspecting his work, Flair was still holding on to my hair, still pulling with all the vim and vigor of Pee-Wee Herman at that movie theater. I heard "one-fifteen" screamed through the closed door. I began to realize this number calling had nothing to do with a room number, but was the amount of time until we went back on the air.

With time running out, Gene was not quite satisfied and doubled up the sandpaper and slit three lines horizontally across my face, under my cheek and eye. My face felt like I was wearing a jellyfish, and I now knew three things: emit no sound; fuck, this *really* hurts; and in one minute and fifteen seconds I'll be back on the air. I thought to myself that the worst must be over since there was a little more than one minute to air. My world did a 180-degree turn, however, as Gene poured iodine over my open wounds! Being a pro, he didn't leave me hanging out there to dry. He brought me full circle as a good Frat Father would by following the iodine with a big glob of New Skin! New Skin is a real thick alcoholic substance that substitutes for Band-Aids; when you put it on, if you have any little cut or nick, it just stings like crazy. So now it *really* felt like I had a jellyfish on my face.

Suddenly Flair let go and Anderson took half a step back. I must say, I received very few compliments in my career, but this next one stands out among the few. As I sat there on the toilet seat in silence, there was a sudden stillness in the air. The compliment consisted of two simple words that Gene said to Ric: "Tough kid!" Flair nodded. My chest began to swell and I felt proud. At that moment I was proud to be a pro wrestler. And I was proud that I hadn't let my fathers down.

As this special moment passed, another yell came through the closed door, "thirty seconds till air," and just as the AD's voice trailed off, I heard Gene softly say, "Kid?" I turned my head to look up at Anderson, and he coldcocked me as hard as he could right over my left eye with his six-inch fist, leaving a gash. Flair charged out of the bathroom and Gene told me, "Go get him, kid." I then stood up from the toilet, my feathers fanned like a peacock, and staggered into the studio to the gasps of the crowd just in time to go back on air. By the audience's reactions I knew they were thinking that what they had seen two minutes and fifty-four seconds earlier—Ric and Gene dragging my face on the floor—must have been real! How else could they have done that?

Folks, this is where I tend to lose my sense of humor. Imagine that your son, brother, sister, or just somebody you like was being systematically tortured in return for money. You might argue that I wasn't forced to sit there; I did it of my own free will. WRONG. I had been trained like the lion in the circus by the promoter to sit and be quiet, of "my own free will." I was to do as I was told by "my own free will," or else. Why do I lose my sense of humor? Because, folks, I'm talking about a Sickness that can lead to death.

Wrestlers like Kerry Von Erich and Rick Rude were real men with real families, and were daddies who aren't going home anymore. These men lost their lives because they were consumed by the

Sickness. Are you entertained by this? Do you find any humor in this? If I laid everything down brick by brick for you, it wouldn't bring you any closer to understanding the Sickness. The Sickness is not a common cold, but a very real part of the wrestling world. I have wrestled for thirty-three years and I've lost more than thirty-three Frat Brothers. When you look at the numbers that averages to over one death per year. These men were all my good friends who were led down a path of no return by the Sickness. That's why I stopped going to funerals. I did the eulogy at Adrian Adonis's funeral and that's the last funeral I'll attend with the exception of my own—and I might even be late for that.

WrestleMania XII took place on March 31, 1996, and Vince McMahon had decided to capitalize on the O. J. Simpson Bronco chase—once again displaying his high moral standards. I was up against a wrestler in the WWF called Goldust. I believe that Dustin Rhodes, a.k.a. Goldust, got his name by ribbing on the square to shove it up his father's ass. His father was Hall of Famer Dusty Rhodes. What was being shoved up Dusty's ass? you ask. Well, just the fact that the Texas-born son of the macho wrestling legend was now dressed up like a transvestite and calling himself Goldust!

McMahon called our match a Hollywood Backlot Brawl. It was Roddy Piper with a bat and Goldust with a gold Cadillac, of course. This match was like me, hardcore through and through. Two weeks before the Backlot Brawl, while I was doing a pilot for a series called *Daytona Beach*, I injured myself when I jumped barefoot off a lifeguard stand. I broke my right foot in five places and my left foot in three places, not to mention that nine months before this I had a hip replacement. When it came time to participate in the Backlot Brawl, doctors had to put Novocain in my feet so I could walk. Even though I had two broken feet and had undergone hip-replacement surgery, I went through with the match. Tell me that ain't sick!

We shot the match in Disney's parking lot with McMahon and approximately twenty Disney reps watching. Toward the end of this brawl, Goldust climbed into the Cadillac, put the pedal to the metal, and headed straight for me. I was told earlier to be sure I got out of the way, since once Goldust got started and that Caddy was flying toward me, he would have had no way of stopping. I remember thinking this very clearly, watching this gold Cadillac heading straight at me. I remember the look of determination on Goldust's face to speed out of camera view as fast as he could.

I don't know why, but with the huge car rushing toward me, a strange picture flashed before my eyes. It was something I had seen earlier that week: Vince McMahon Jr. holding my eight-year-old son Colt's hand and *watching* me. As the Caddy came closer, I just decided I could slap the hood of this car and take the shot. The car hit me and I was thrown five feet in the air! I then got up without a mark on me, went into an awaiting Ford Bronco, and proceeded to do a chase scene similar to O. J. Simpson's. Late in the TV segment, the actual Simpson Ford Bronco chase scene was shown, and it ended with me and Goldust entering the arena.

Why did I do it? Why did I let myself get hit by a speeding car? The answer is simple: because I was fully consumed by the Sickness. It was embedded in me; no retreat, no surrender. The pride of my sport was being challenged and I had come up to bat! Why? Because they told me to and I took an oath and I gave my word. Are you starting to understand the premeditated evil and cunning that happens in wrestling for the sole purpose of making money at all costs, while destroying, or at least controlling, the commodities?

I will give you another example and pray to God that you will grasp the depth of the commitment of the wrestler who is there to entertain you—or maybe it's just the Sickness?

It was midnight and we were in Miami in the "Marri-rott" airport hotel, as we lovingly called it. I was there with a fine man and athlete known as Kerry Von Erich, a.k.a. the Texas Tornado. We were the best of friends. In fact, he felt comfortable enough to sit with me in a hotel and shoot the breeze with his prosthetic off. (Kerry had lost his foot in a motorcycle accident.)

This night, as we entered our hotel room, I put the dead bolt out to leave the hotel-room door ajar. (This was the traditional wrestler's way. We did this so that when room service came we wouldn't have to get off our lazy asses to answer the door!) We did our wrestler's routine by unpacking and putting our wrestling tights over the lampshades. (They make quite good clothes dryers.) We then sat down on our respective beds and proceeded to share a joint.

Kerry and I had often talked about suicide and also about its so-called cousin (really a completely different breed of cat): assisted murder. All our Frat Brothers had different levels of tolerance in life and they had been pushed and pushed, day after day. They had to spend endless days on the road away from their families trying to earn a living, keep a job with their promoters, and yet at the same time reach main-event status. The Sickness consumed different people at different times and the rope snapped. Does this sound like something that would happen to someone at a normal job on a normal business day? Unless, that is, you're a postman.

Kerry had shared some very intimate stories about his brothers with me, and I shared stories about myself. This evening, however, there was happiness in the air and no mention of any negative things. As we smoked the joint, we both got up and talked our way over to the window. One of us opened it, and to our surprise, we found it large enough to fit a human body through. Without breaking the stride of our giggling conversation, we both climbed through the eighth-story window and onto the ledge. The two of us were as high as kites, standing with our backs to the building on a ledge that was approximately eight inches wide!

Not even the slamming of the window broke the rhythm of our bubbly conversation. We were now trapped outside. Upon realizing our predicament, we giggled and I pulled another joint out of my pocket and we lit up and smoked. We were just enjoying the view. I don't know how long we were out there, but suddenly Big Boss Man and Curt Hennig were frantically opening the window and pulling us back in, almost losing Kerry in the process! No questions were asked and the night went on.

Approximately two months later my friend Kerry shot himself in the heart. I know why. It was the Sickness.

The Sickness is not something a wrestler is born with. He inherits it later in life from his forefathers who don't even know the legacy they are leaving. But the promoters make sure it is passed on in a very cold and calculated, tried-and-true way. As I said earlier, "The amount of Sickness in the wrestler is directly proportional to the amount of manipulation used by the promoter." In order to understand the Sickness completely, you must also understand the extent of the manipulation.

Upon first contact with the promoter, the wrestler is infected. In most cases, the first means of transmission is the handshake. The manipulation begins at this moment. The promoter starts programming you from the first second he sees you. As he shakes your hand he asks you, "How are you?" (As if he cares.) With this handshake the promoter is judging you. What is he judging? Do you know the secret handshake? This will tell him how experienced you are and give him an indication of how hard you might be to handle. A promoter can read your handshake more efficiently and much more accurately than the finest fortune-teller reading your palm. This first handshake can set the stage for the rest of your business relationship.

Let me give you an example. I went to wrestle in Portland, Oregon, and I met the promoter Don Owen. It was Saturday and I went out and had a great match. Don Owen was happy, the fans were happy, and I was happy. Then, the following day, I drove to Eugene to wrestle and met another promoter. He approached me and introduced himself. As he shook my hand, he said, "Hi, I'm Don Owen's brother, Elton." Now, why didn't he just say, "Hi, I'm Elton Owen?" Why? Because he immediately began Manipulation 101 by establishing that "Don Owen is boss." Now they can play good cop, bad cop. They set the tone of your relationship, and you, the wrestler, still haven't uttered one word.

But the manipulation doesn't stop there. I will tell you a story to help you understand.

One day I came into an arena at about 1 P.M. for a television shoot. The WWF was riding high. As I walked down the hall, weaving my way through my Frat Brothers (who looked like the bunch from the bar scene in *Star Wars*), I passed by the blackboard that had the matches chalked on them (chalk is easily erased if a wrestler is dropped). I saw Vince McMahon Jr. beaming, standing next to his newest wonder-of-the-world prodigy: the six-foot seven-inch, three-hundred-pound chiseled mass of Sid Vicious. They were both greeting people who passed by.

Let me try to help you understand what was going on here. The promoter's motive in manipulation this time was to make all of the other wrestlers remember that everyone is replaceable and that there is always someone ready to take their job. He was also reinforcing the possibility that a few more shots of testosterone may be in order for them to keep their jobs. Lastly, and unbeknownst to Sid, Vince was turning the boys against the newcomer, ensuring that he would become Vince's ally and confidant.

This particular case, however, was one in which the simple Manipulation 101 tactic came back to bite Vince in the ass! Sid had been told prior to being put in the display window that he was the chosen one, that he would be the next World Champion. He had been flown first class around the country, and driven around in style in stretch limousines, unlike the other 98 percent of the wrestlers. So two days later, Sid, having now graduated from Manipulation 101 and believing every word he had been told, went back to Atlanta to prepare for his move to the Big Apple. Let me remind you that Sid had been hanging out with the WCW wrestlers and that Atlanta was the WCW's backyard.

When he arrived in Atlanta, he went to a local bar with all the cocky swagger of a banty rooster. He started drinking and bragging about his new position with the WWF. Remember, Vince had turned all the boys against Sid by showcasing him, or in other terminology, by shoving him up their asses! By this time there wasn't a wrestler anywhere who hadn't heard about Vince naming Sid his golden child and giving him the royal treatment. You want to talk about jealousy? One of the greatest weapons in a promoter's arsenal is jealousy, and thanks to Sid, it was working like a charm. It was a textbook case. Unfortunately for Vince, the greater the weapon, the greater the potential backfire. Sid, a wonderful guy who just happened to get caught in the web of the Sickness and manipulation at the same time, certainly didn't help the situation with his newfound arrogance. And what's even sicker was that he didn't even know he was being manipulated. But his drinking a couple too many cocktails and his shooting off his mouth ensured that any hope of forgiveness from any of the wrestlers was zero.

As Sid's alcohol level rose, so did his level of bragging, and unfortunately for him, so did the blood pressure of every wrestler in the bar. Eventually some of the WCW wrestlers had heard all they could take. They literally threw Sid out of the bar. Peace and whiskey tranquillity filled the room and nobody gave the incident a second thought. He was just another asshole passing through.

Suddenly the Vicious came out in Sid and the bar entrance was filled with his mammoth presence. He began ranting the best thirty-second promo of his life—where's a camera when you need it?—holding a weapon in his right hand. He was screaming, "Come on, all you fuckers, I'll take you all on!"

He waved the object around the room; it was supposed to even the odds against the twelve WCW wrestlers present. As curious eyes tried to focus upon the weapon he was waving around, people began screaming; "He's got a pipe." "No, he's got a bat." "Shit! He went and got a crowbar out of his car."

Then, a soft squeaky voice broke through: through the mayhem, "Nah, he's got a squeegee," it said. A what? Michael Graham, all five feet six inches and 185 pounds of him, stood up from his table and made sure everyone understood what he was saying. "He's packing a fucking squeegee!"

The pint-size Graham, who was as tough as nails, walked straight up to Sid and, staring him straight in the navel, said, "If you don't shut up and get out of here now, I'm going to shove that squeegee up your ass!"

The reality of the situation kicked in. Sid had to be asking himself through his alcohol-befuddled brain, "What am I doing?" and he turned and walked out of the bar. It was too late, however; the damage had been done. It must have hit the AP news wire immediately because when I walked into the WWF arena the following day, the building was riddled with squeegees, complemented by a chalkboard illustration from an unknown artist (actually Bret Hart) depicting all the antics that had taken place the night before. Fucking brutal! The golden child's crown had been removed with the swipe of a squeegee! I believe that Sid Vicious is a good guy with a good heart, but he got completely caught up not only in the Sickness, but also in the manipulation on a high level.

So as every wrestler walked past McMahon that early afternoon in the arena, they gave him a glance and a smile that said, "Nice choice of your boy, Vince." Vince dropped Sid like a bad habit within thirty days of the squeegee incident. His attempt at trying to control Sid and manipulate him had totally backfired. Sid then had to live with the results. This is a textbook example not only of the cruelty of the promoter, but of the wrestlers who have to deal with his manipulation day in day out, in order to feed their families.

Another textbook example of the Sickness is the case of Bruiser Brody (Frank Goodish), who was set to wrestle in a match with the Masked Invader (José Gonzalez) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on July 17, 1988. Brody was murdered in the locker room that night, a victim of several stab wounds to the stomach.

According to an article in *wrestlingmuseum.com,* José Gonzalez was charged with the murder but walked away a free man. Tony Atlas, who was the only eyewitness, refused to testify at the trial, and Brody's family's legal team had been relying on his testimony.

How do you sum up a disease that the world of medicine doesn't recognize, the general public doesn't know or care about, and the people who have it don't know it?

You may be asking yourself how did I come to recognize the Sickness? Well, to be honest, I never would have on my own. I only came around because of my beautiful wife. Many times she saved my life and taught me how to love. She taught me what a father should be and showed me how to handle responsibility. She never faltered once. She never gave up on me, and until this day, my wife is responsible for all my success in recovering from the Sickness.

How do you justify being with your best friend, your Frat Brother Kerry von Erich in the dressing room one moment and then the next night he's gone forever? How do you explain being in a match with Rick McGraw and it turns out to be his last match before his death? After he dies, people then claim it was an overdose, but they don't tell you about the problems he was having with his family or the problems he was having with his career. How do you come back to a dressing room and notice that the last man you wrestled, who sat in the same chair every night for fifteen years, isn't there anymore? How do you recognize the Sickness when you have some referee yelling at you that you're up next and some agent asking "Did you do that interview?" and all the night after someone you were close to has just died? And if you remind them of this, they look at you like you're crazy and answer, "What? We've got a show to do."

How do you go to your Frat Brother's funeral when you remember him telling you to throw a party for him in case he died? Adrian Adonis had told me that if he ever died he didn't want people mourning over him; he wanted them to have a party and celebrate his life. So when I was giving his eulogy I said this and his wife let out a moan that would just sink your heart. A moan of sorrow and sadness that will live with me forever. When I looked into his kids' eyes, what was I supposed to tell them?

I don't have the answers to these questions I just lived them. There is only one answer I do know for sure: the Sickness is very, very real.

13

Hot in the Box

Two wrestlers who always had a story to tell were my ex-tag-team partner Adrian Adonis and Jesse Ventura. Adrian once told me about a time when he and Jesse were in the terminal at the Denver airport and they caused a scene that witnesses will never forget.

After the Royal Duo came off their plane, they began walking through the crowded airport toward the baggage-claim area and the crowd parted like the Red Sea; no one wanted to be in the way of these two real-life giants. On the left was Adonis, who was 265 pounds of unbridled girth, with perfect childbearing hips, and on the right—sporting a wonderful boa scarf with sequined jacket and accessories, complemented by an Aunt Jemima head rag and a wardrobe that a DNA expert couldn't match (and only Boy George would be proud of)—was the one and only Jesse "The Body" Ventura.

Then, as fast as lightning and without any warning, the man who was destined to become the governor of Minnesota decided to show off his best diving moves and jumped four feet in the air and did a nice half pike with a double gainer and landed flat on his back! (Adrian told me later on that he couldn't believe that Jesse didn't even lose his sunglasses!) But what was really happening here was Jesse's body had gone into some serious convulsions.

The next thing you know Adrian was yelling: "We got a man down, get me a medic!" If Jesse the former navy SEAL had been conscious, I think he would have said, "Haven't I heard this somewhere before?" He was then taken from the airport to a Denver hospital for observation. Luckily he wound up being okay after the scary incident.

I guess there must have been some special karma surrounding this splendid twosome. One Christmas Ventura and Adonis phoned me from Minneapolis, where they were wrestling as a tag team, to brag about the success they were having. I happened to be living in the legendary Bomber Hotel in Portland at the time. I remember them bragging about their fancy coats and lobster dinners as I lay in front of my broken door, thermostat set on max, oven set on bake, eating my Christmas Spam while trying not to freeze to death. I would have cooked up one of the rats, but I needed all of them around me for body heat. Anyway, several years later I caught up with the extravagant pair in New York, where all of wrestling's rebels—and Adrian and Jesse were definitely rebels—had been called by Vince Sr. to help him take over the world.

When I first saw Adrian, I gave him a big hug. He and I had a long history. In our tag-team days we were called the .22's. Yeah, we had been a couple of running guns all right, and we sure weren't shooting blanks, although that would have helped to keep us both out of trouble! We were definitely Frat Brothers. I never knew how much Adrian had helped me in life until the day I gave his eulogy. I summed him up in one word—*impresario.*

As far as Jesse the Gov goes, the only way to explain his wrestling ability is this. If you were his tag partner and he was in the ring, you had to beg him to tag you before the bell rang to start the match. That was the only way to keep what little credibility and real estate value you might have had left. Basically what I'm saying is that by the time the Gov left the dressing room, got into the ring, flexed his muscles, and did the twist with his boa scarf, you'd pretty much seen his best stuff!

One day the Gov told me the best news my sport has ever heard. With a pound of chew between his lower lip and gum he said, "I just threw my wrestling boots off of the Minneapolis bridge. My wrestling career is over." In my imagination, the New York ticker-tape parade was under way! After my momentary cerebral celebration, I asked him what he was going to do now. Then I prepared myself for the three-hour monologue that I knew was coming.

Jesse told me that he was going to do color commentary with Vince McMahon Jr. on the television broadcasts and Pay-Per-Views. Before he could finish his next sentence, I said, "Good for you." Then I departed swiftly! The Gov never missed a beat and just picked up the conversation with the next poor, unsuspecting wrestler who happened to wander by. But let me give credit where credit is due. The Gov did a great job in the announcer's booth. He had a unique and entertaining approach and the fans loved him!

At this time the WWF was growing so fast that Junior soon struck a deal with Coliseum Video that took off like a rocket. Vince offered WWF videotapes produced by Coliseum for sale at large chains like Blockbuster. This line of videos created a new market for the WWF and started a whole new revenue-producing frenzy that only Junior could have dreamed of. This beautiful Yellow Brick Road of videotapes would lead him right to the Bank of Oz. But there was a problem that Vince knew he'd eventually have to face. The wrestlers were going to want a piece of the pie for their part in making this work. You see, once the red light is on, it's out of the promoter's hands. He can plan all he wants, but when the bell rings, *we're* the boss. The size of the piece of pie you got was directly proportional to the size of your bite.

The top wrestlers in the WWF, like Andre, Hogan, Savage, and myself, eventually all got half a fair share. However, the Gov didn't receive the same treatment. Remember now that Jesse had been doing color commentary at the Pay-Per-View events with Vince, and these were also going out on Coliseum Video. But the Gov was not receiving his "campaign contributions" from the WWF like the rest of us. If you really wanted to piss off the Gov, all you had to do was take away his due share.

Well, Jesse caught on and confronted McMahon and the shrapnel began to fly. The verbal battle ended with the Gov saying, "Listen, Junior, I've been under fire before. You don't scare me!" Ventura turned and walked out of the door with the confidence of a true navy SEAL. McMahon just stood there fuming, his face turning Irish red while the varicose vein in his nose did the beer-barrel polka!

A few days later McMahon realized that the Gov really wasn't coming back. Could it actually be that someone would not *want* to be with Vince McMahon Jr. and serve under his reign? Nobody would ever actually walk away from the WWF, would they? You're damn right they would! That's when Junior and his entire staff started to realize how big Ventura's fan base really was. There was a massive, negative uproar among the fans when they heard that the Gov had left.

So Vince and his staff gathered together for a meeting of the minds. They came up with their standard answer, the one they always had when shit hit the fan. It was always the same: *"Call Piper!"* Vince called me immediately. My response at first was, "No! Voice-overs are for the washed-up wrestlers."

Thanks to the education that my forefathers had given me, I sensed Vince's dilemma in the first ten seconds of the conversation. I could tell that he was desperate. I also had something *huge* up my sleeve (as well as up my kilt!) that Junior was not aware of. Big John Studd, God bless him, knew the details of the Gov's contract and filled me in on the whole thing. Armed with that knowledge, I took it up with the WWF's then vice president, a good man by the name of Dick Glover, and he took care of me and signed me to a deal. I got a very healthy contract to come in every three weeks to do voice-overs (VOs). All condiments were extra!

Once again the education that my forefathers gave me came through for me. I'll put it to you as they put it to me:

1. Seize the moment.
2. Never hit a promoter when he's down.
3. *Kick him—it's easier!*

The first day of VOs with Junior was also the first time that I ever got an "eyes are the windows to the soul" view of his knowledge of wrestling. On that first day of VOs, we began with the on-camera openings and closings. We then headed for the Hot Box, a room that was no more than an eight-by-six hole-in-the-wall, where we were handed two microphones and were expected to comment on the day's matches. I called it the Hot Box not only because we sometimes sweated our asses off in the room, but also because in order to make the show pop we were constantly under the improv gun for usually five hours straight. It was a constant mental *bang, bang, bang*, where you had to be on your toes and creative all the time.

That first day I walked into the studio to do the on-camera work, dragging somewhat like I'd always done for the last twenty years (when you have no pulse, you're a hard guy to detect), Vince didn't even notice I was there. I stood there in a quiet coma while Junior barked orders to the entire crew and the production assistant started the countdown: five, four, three, two, one . . . *bang!* As natural as making honey is to a bee, I was doing my 21,780-something interview. I came out of the blocks as usual and "Rowdy" Roddy Piper came to life! No one had told me that Junior was off-limits and that he didn't like to be touched. Well, he was holding the mike so, in my book, that made him fair game. I was on him so much that he must have thought he was getting mugged!

After I finished the intro, Vince became unraveled and unglued and then regained his composure. He looked at me with this shit-eating grin and said, "Wow, what hair got up your ass? That was great!" I didn't understand what he was talking about. Was it the interviews? I'd been doing the same thing for years and he hadn't said a word. From then on, after each interview, he kept complimenting me on my newfound energy. It had always been there, but he'd never made true, close contact with "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. He had only watched me do interviews from afar, and there's a big difference between that and having the guy right next to you. That's when I realized that he really hadn't appreciated my previous interviews, and how much effort went into each and every one. He had just taken them for granted.

As the day went on, things just got hotter in the box. We went back and forth for hours. Piper passed the ball to Junior, who kicked into second gear. Junior then threw a lateral to Piper and the war was on! When I caught the ball, I took myself out of neutral, and as I passed him on the VOs, I told him that I'd leave the ball on the forty-five-yard line for him. Junior then slammed into fourth gear and scooped up the ball. Vince was trying so hard to keep up with me.

Thank the good Lord for those lessons from my forefathers, because I knew I had Junior in the palm of my hand. This was my area of expertise. The promoter-turned-announcer was in a foreign territory and he didn't know how to handle himself there. He had never been next to anybody like Roddy Piper—live, unplugged, and uncensored! By this time the Hot Box had earned its name. There was Vince, dripping with sweat and his hair matted to his head. His face was beet red and the infamous varicose vein in his nose was throbbing full tilt. He was now projecting at the top of his lungs, trying to keep up his composure while maintaining creative control. So I kicked it up another notch, snatched the ball from him at the forty-five-yard line, ran all the way into the end zone for a touchdown, and won the game. I finished with three weeks' worth of interviews in three and a half hours. (By the way, did I mention that my machine has eighteen gears?)

As soon as the word "wrap!" was shouted, sweat-hog Junior in his waterlogged Armani suit did a 180-degree turn and, without saying a word, blew out the door. As I was leaving the Hot Box, getting my stuff together, Bruce Pritchard came down to the green room with a very concerned look on his face and said, "Boy, that Vince, he's something else." I asked, "What do you mean?" Pritchard replied, "The poor guy must have been sick all day and didn't complain. He's upstairs in his office puking his guts out. What a trooper!"

Trooper my ass! My forefathers would have been proud. The reason Vince was in his office puking his brains out was that I had been a beat ahead of him all day on the mike and he had been struggling to keep up with me. I had him going so hard that he just got sick to his stomach—I blew him up. I must admit that I stayed in that Hot Box after Pritchard left and horse-laughed for a good five minutes! When I finally stopped laughing, I hurriedly left the building before I had to see any other office personnel.

Because of my seclusion on the West Coast, I was not up on any of the office gossip when I returned to New York to do my second set of VOs. As I opened the green-room door, I was surprised to see the office staff and some of the wrestlers looking at me with huge grins on their faces. Macho Man even walked up, shook my hand, and said, "Jesse who?" I didn't know that the ratings had skyrocketed. I had reached another two-million-plus homes. I had earned free rein! It got so difficult for Junior to compete with me in the box that he had to bring in reinforcements. So one day during the VOs, Randy Savage walked through the door ready to strut his stuff on the mike. Well, half of the people knew that I'd been kicking the shit out of Junior in the interviews, and I should have known that he wouldn't stand for playing second fiddle. So Savage, Vince, and I became the Three Musketeers.

For the next four months you could have cut the air in the Hot

Box with a knife. One time Savage and Junior started a business argument right in the middle of a VO. Patience not being one of my virtues, I cracked after about three minutes of this bullshit. "Can't you guys take this up later?" I asked. Savage was feeling macho and he blurted back to me, "I don't need no cheerleader that wears a dress." Vince quickly defused the situation by saying, "Roll 'em!"

As soon as the VOs ended, Savage steamed out of the box. I was going to join him to show him that some of the world's greatest warriors wore—and still wear—kilts, but Junior grabbed my arm and said, "Please, let it go, Rod." I gave Vince the respect he asked for and let it go—for the time being!

When I got back to the Stamford Sheraton, where Savage and I were both staying, the remark about the cheerleader and the dress was still on my mind. The Stamford Sheraton Lounge became fresher in my mind, however, so I ended up hitting the bar first. Things get kind of blurry here, so I have to count on Savage for the rest of the story.

According to him, after I left the bar I decided to find him and drag him into my room. For over two hours I explained to him, "I wear a kilt! Not a dress!" He told me that my speech was very informative and that as a result of it he understood that comments about my attire were not a good thing to make. He also told me he now had a much greater appreciation of my Scottish heritage and that he also knew that I had never tried out for a cheerleading team.

Later Savage said, "I wasn't scared to fight; it just seemed that it would have required a lot of effort for nothing." After our "short" chat in my room, we came away with a mutual respect for each other. In my book, Macho Man is a stand-up guy. It was at this time that I found out about Junior's "Achilles' heel." The next day, during a break from some more VOs, an employee handed Vince a copy of one of the major New York papers. The article he read must have called him names because he became really upset. I saw him hurled down to the depths of darkness! This was the first time that I had ever seen his armor plating ripped off. He immediately grabbed the phone and called an emergency conference so he could rebut what was being said about him. That one hurt! If that wasn't enough, Jesse the Gov was ultimately paid over $800,000 as a result of his lawsuit.

After taking this hit, McMahon decided to pass out memos to everyone announcing Jesse's recovery. Why? He was probably trying to use reverse psychology—more promoter manipulation. It was Vince's way of saying, "Fuck the Gov and all the rest of you. I dare you to try to sue me, you sorry bunch of peons! This guy might have gotten away with it this time, but it will never happen again." I guess you could say that on this particular day, "Vince had time to bleed."

Time went by and one day Macho Man and I had dragged our sorry asses to another one of our infamous sessions of three weeks' worth of VOs in one shot when in walked Curt Hennig. We all had a nice "Hey how are you? How's the family?" chat. Then came *the* question: "Hey, Curt, what are you doing here?" "Vince called me in to do VOs," he said. Randy and I thought, "That's cool, Vince must be leaving and now the three of us will have a ball."

So Savage and I wandered back to the Hot Box. Vince came in and said, "I'm dying in my house shows because all of my talent is in the box." This was your basic promoter's version of "You're fired!" Savage immediately jumped in Vince's face and was off and running! I generally dealt with these things more privately, so I decided to just watch. Eventually Vince couldn't take any more of Randy's verbal bombardments or my death stares, so he left. With Junior gone, Hennig became the focus of Savage's wrath. We were now thinking that Hennig was full of crap, that he had just showed up on his own without an invitation to try to screw us out of our jobs. Savage turned on Hennig and growled:"You undermining son of a bitch!"

Things just kept escalating and getting uglier and crazier until the two were inches away from blows. Junior finally walked back into the room and Hennig immediately took him aside. You see, Hennig is a good man and didn't have a clue as to what was going on. He asked McMahon, "Why did you put me on the spot like that?" Why? Well, here it is, folks, straight from the mouth of Vince McMahon Jr. "I don't tell anybody anything they need to know until they need to know it!" Weren't we the guys who were working for the promoter and making him his money?

I was only a year and a half into my three-year deal for this particular gig, so I had some serious decisions to make. To sue or not to sue? That was the question. Looking back at things now, I wonder if Vince was specifically targeting Savage and me with that flyer about being sued by Governor Jesse. It seemed that Vince was attempting to phase us out. I think Junior knew at the time that he was going to try to get out from underneath our contracts and bring in cheaper talent and was trying to scare us.

That's the *thanks* I got. I had stepped in and made the fans forget about Jesse leaving, something that could have been a major blow to the company if I hadn't salvaged the situation. I saved the ratings from dropping, and as a matter of fact, they even started going up. I bought Vince time to restructure and build a new talent pool while I was carrying the load. And now Vince could claim the title of Mr. Microphone while he brought this new talent into the Hot Box and paid them a fraction of my price. At the same time he also manipulated and controlled them so they could not be a threat to his microphone kingdom. He had gotten free lessons from the Hot Box best and now didn't need me!

I knew I could easily rebound at that time in my career—I could get booked anywhere. I was the most hated wrestler in the world! As for Savage, he's still wondering what happened. I'll bet that every time he snaps into a Slim Jim, he pretends it's Junior's neck!

14

Roddy Gets Rowdy

OUR journey together through the pages of my life as a pro wrestler is coming to a close for now, so before I pull over the Yellow Canary to let you out from what has, I hope, been a fun ride, I want to share with you some final thoughts on what I learned both in and out of the ring during my career.

One thing I learned at an early age was that I turned to wrestling as a profession for different reasons than my forefathers did. Whereas they latched on to the sport because of their childhood dreams, athletic abilities, or desire for stardom, I just wanted a clean bed, something to eat, and the paycheck that came along with climbing into a ring and getting my head kicked in by some three-hundred-pound monster.

That wrestling became my life, and I became wrestling, was largely a matter of fate, for it was not a life I chose. It became my best option by default. Home, at the time, was a dark, dark, Canadian youth hostel only marginally more pleasant than living on the streets. So when the opportunity to earn fifteen dollars a night presented itself to me, it was a no-brainer, as fifteen dollars was a whole lot of money to a pimple-faced lad who was scratching and clawing to survive. It didn't matter that I had to go all the way up to the tundra to earn my cash—it was better than playing my bagpipes on the corner for quarters.

Eventually, I became a regular for Al Tomko in the AWA and wrestled my first pro match as a single for a ten-dollar bump-up to twenty-five dollars. I remember being in the locker room before the match, and nervousness and fear getting the best of me. As I bent over a toilet and puked my guts out—a fifteen-year-old boy trying to find his place in a man's world—I heard the callous laughter of the promoter. He walked over, gave me a pat on the back, and said, "If you're gonna die, kid, die in the ring. It's good for business."

Well, as it turns out, I didn't die in the ring that night. As a matter of fact I have made a living off the sport for over thirty years. Although I wasn't always treated or paid well, I didn't mind, as I grew to love wrestling and the great men who were all around me. These caring gladiators took me under their wings and not only taught me how to earn my keep between the ropes, but also helped sculpt me into the person I am today. My forefathers helped turn Roderick George Toombs into "Rowdy" Roddy Piper.

Another thing that I was introduced to early in my career was the lowest animal known to man. No, I'm not talking about a snake—well, then again, I am talking about a snake, a well-dressed kind of snake—the P. I learned the hard way that the promoter was always out for himself. As far as a promoter caring about the wrestler as a human being, the basic rule (I'm not sure who coined it) is: if you can walk you can wrestle. No excuses? Why? Because promoters don't like to give refunds. So, if you weren't ready to go on or were nowhere to be found when called upon to wrestle, the P just moved on to the next guy in line and you were shit out of luck and money.

The best job-saving excuse I have ever heard came from Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart in the Boston Garden dressing room. The

Anvil was a five-foot-eight, three-hundred-pound powerhouse who looked like a refugee from ZZ Top. Jim had a slight problem—he was always missing matches! So we dubbed him "missing in action." One time Jim had been MIA for three consecutive days, missing three wrestling matches in a row. You didn't do that if you wanted to earn a living in the ring. It was considered a mortal sin.

To compound Jim's problems, it was his second MIA that month. When he finally showed up for work that day in the Boston Garden, he was met by an old-timer named Chief Jay Strongbow, who had been made a road agent by the WWF. A road agent at that time was basically a washroom monitor who had the ability to get you fired.

Again, this was Jim's second disappearance that month, so the scene was very serious. Jim had three lovely children and a wife at home, so termination was not an option for him. I listened in as Jim was explaining his whereabouts ever so sincerely to the chief while tugging on his honest red goatee.

His explanation went something like this: "Chief, it was midnight and I was driving home from Dayton when all of a sudden I heard *bump, bump* outside my car. So I figured I must have hit something. I pulled the car over to the side of the road, and in the blackness of the night I ran back to help the poor little animal I had so irresponsibly hit." Then Jim started running in place—all three-hundred pounds of him—acting out the scene.

Now, this line of bullshit really grabbed my attention as I was lying on the dressing-room bench, nursing my hangover from the night before. Through bleary eyes, I watched Jim recount the incident with the most genuine remorse in his voice and a look of sincere sorrow on his face that was reminiscent of a basset hound's.

As he got deeper and deeper into the story, Jim repeatedly pulled on that fire-engine-red goatee. "Chief," he said, "it was a cat and I love pussies, so I bent down to help the poor little thing. But I found out it doesn't pay to be nice. That stupid little son of a bitch scratched the shit out of me!"

Jim, letting his true colors shine through, continued to explain that as he started driving home he got light-headed and dizzy and his stomach felt kind of queasy. His vision then started getting blurry, but luckily he saw a hospital sign and headed right for the emergency room. He was then in a coma for two straight days.

With a concerned look on his face, the chief asked Jim if he was okay.

Jim replied, "No, Chief, I'm okay. I've been cleared to wrestle again."

The chief breathed a sigh of relief, since substitutions are not received kindly by wrestling fans on a wrestling card, and told Jim to go get ready. The chief slowly walked away scratching his head, utterly confused. He must have been thinking: "Is this guy pulling my leg or what? What the hell could you catch from a stray cat?"

About ten minutes later, as Jim was heading out into the arena to wrestle, the chief stopped him and asked, "So what the fuck did you have again? Was it the flu?"

"No!" Jim said, and kept walking up the runway.

"Then what was it?" the chief asked again.

And as Jim went through the curtain on his way to the ring, his voice trailed behind him, saying, "Cat-scratch fever, Chief. Cat-scratch fever."

You just can't make stuff like that up, folks.

One thing I did try to make up when I was twenty-four years old was a union for the wrestlers. I tried to start this organization so that my forefathers, Frat Brothers, and I would be well taken care of when we decided to hang up our trunks and boots.

Well, needless to say my efforts fell by the wayside. My idea for a wrestling union was rejected, and we still have no representative body to supply us with pensions and, most importantly, medical benefits. I learned in this case that nice guys don't only finish last, they sometimes also get blackballed.

Even though I was a young boy and new to the business, I had a vision of what we needed. It's funny; Vince McMahon used to say, "Piper, you're always before your time!" and he was right. I started trying to get the word out in 1978 through an underground newsletter that I wrote and distributed in the locker rooms. If you look at wrestling from the time of this newsletter and compare it with wrestling today, you'd find that while the sport of wrestling has grown by leaps and bounds into a billion-dollar business, little has changed for us, the ones who put our lives and bodies on the line each night.

Wrestlers still don't have any medical insurance or anything else that was listed in the pamphlet. Although I was only in my twenties when I came up with the idea, I knew something had to be done to balance the scales between the wrestlers and the promoters. If you went to any of the promoters' homes, you would see lovely and beautiful mansions, but on the flip side, we were struggling from paycheck to paycheck. And God forbid we got hurt on the job; not only did we have to work through the pain, we also had to get by without any medical assistance.

Today, unfortunately, things are no different. Sure, guys are pulling in huge salaries nowadays, but what happens when the lights go out on their careers? Or what happens if an injury forces them to retire? Do they have anything to fall back on? Is there any union that will stand up for them and provide assistance to them? Sadly, the answer is still no. And I've seen over the years how the sport has been severely changed between the ropes.

It's no longer a sport, but sports-entertainment, where the promoter makes huge amounts of money "prostituting" these men and women athletes to the viewing audience each week. It's no longer about one-on-one competition in the ring; it's more about T&A and what the P thinks the fans want to see.

Well, let me tell you something, folks. If I were to ever see my son Colt on a Pay-Per-View for his first big main event and at the end of the match they had a 320-pound Samoan in a thong sit on his face in front of millions of people, I would know he was being manipulated. If I were to see this on TV while I was back home in Portland and the event was taking place in New York, I would be at the promoter's door before he even got home from the matches. I never stood for that kind of shit in my career, and I would never let my kid be taken advantage of either. You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can't fool me at all when it comes to the wrestling industry.

As of November 2002, I will wear only a black kilt and a black leather jacket because we need to stop the people with the black wings who hold the wrestling world by puppet strings. I will wear black until wrestling is back on track.

Not only did I not stand for the manipulation in my career, I also didn't need to win any titles in order to be happy and successful. All I needed was the smell of the crowd and the roar of the popcorn every night when I climbed into the ring.

Some fans—and grapplers—think a wrestler's success is determined by the number of belts and titles he's held in his career. Not me. In the beginning of my career, like every other aspiring wrestler, I wanted to be the World Champion. When I was nineteen, I won the Light Heavyweight Championship of the World from Chavo Guerrero, but soon after, I realized that that strap and twenty-five cents could only get me a cup of coffee.

Belts really didn't mean anything to me at all. I didn't need a belt to draw money or be successful. Belts are given to people who need the extra boost to draw the cash and fans. I don't mean any disrespect to Hulk Hogan, but I will use him as an example to prove my point. He is a tremendous asset to professional wrestling and to himself. (Sorry, I just had to get a shot in there.) Today, we do have a decent relationship, but earlier in our careers, we didn't see eye to eye—that's for sure.

Hogan needs to be the World Champion and have a belt around his waist because if he doesn't, what else would he do? His character's image and persona in the ring thrive on those situations. He needs to be fighting for something all the time, to have that glory around him; that's what helps to keep him "over." Without that belt, Hogan is dead meat!

Me, I'm different. I got to that point after twenty-six belts, or however many I've held—I don't even count anymore. I was never about titles or championship straps. However, at one point in my career, a buzz started going around the WWF about why Piper wasn't World Champion. The other wrestlers honestly thought that I had a big hard-on because I didn't have the belt. But the fact of the matter is I had drawn and broken every Pay-Per-View record and never needed a belt to do it, so why would I be hung up on that?

Besides this buzz that was going around, I also knew that my tenure with the WWF was coming to a close with all the political crap that was going on within the Federation, so I decided I needed to make some kind of a mark; otherwise it would be too easy to just sweep me under the carpet. So I went along with the rumors and told McMahon that I wanted the intercontinental belt and he agreed to my wishes, but he wanted me to lay my shoulders down for an up-and-coming WWFer named Bret Hart.

This was a big decision for me at the time because Vince knew I wouldn't let anybody pin my shoulders. No matter who it was, I wasn't lying down for any one. Over the years champion after champion got into the ring with me, and none of them walked out with the satisfaction of having pinned me.

But this time would be different because of who I was facing. The first and only time I had my shoulders officially pinned in the WWF, I did it as a favor to Bret Hart. The reason for that is that Bret Hart is my cousin, and one of my best friends in professional wrestling. He is a man who I admire very much.

I remember when Bret first came to the WWF; he was wrestling at Maple Leaf Garden in Toronto. Man, was he white, white, white—that Calgary white—like he hadn't seen sun in about ten years! He had on these pale blue trunks and boots to match and was in the ring with a guy named the Spoiler. This guy was giving

Bret a hard time, and was just doing stupid moves to make Bret look silly. Bret came into the dressing room after his match with his head hung a little low, and I saw him and went over to talk to him.

I told him to travel with me, and I'd tell him what to do with this guy the next time they got into the ring. After this, Bret and I became very, very close, and we've stayed close. We learned we could share our feelings with each other and what we said would never go any other place. This is real important in our sport, as your Frat Brothers become your family when you are on the road. So when Vince told me he wanted me to help him give Bret a push, I was all for it. I wanted to do anything that would help put him over—even if it meant being pinned. And if anyone ever deserved a good main-event push, it was Bret Hart. So I agreed to lay my shoulders down for him, but on my own terms of course. Even though I was going to lose to Bret by pinfall, I dictated the terms. While there may be other wrestlers out there who have more titles and belts than me, no one else can say they've only been officially pinned once in the WWF.

Another time I dictated the terms was when I was with the WCW. A hotshot writer, Vince Russo, from the WWF switched federations and thought he was going to come in and boss wrestlers around, including me. The fact of the matter, I believe, was that Vince Russo really did not like Roddy Piper, even though he didn't know me from Adam Bomb.

I soon found out, by way of his messengers, that I wasn't involved in his plans for the future. One night I was in my dressing room when someone knocked on my door. Ed Ferrara, a scripter who was working with Russo, walked in carrying three or four sheets of paper. It was written dialogue of what they wanted me to say.

As soon as I found out what the papers were for, I politely told Ferrara to tell Russo to come meet me in my dressing room so we could discuss the dialogue. But what was unusual here was that this snot-nosed know-nothing had taken over as the creative force behind the WCW, and he didn't even come in to see me and introduce himself. Please excuse the vanity here, but if you were dealing with a guy with a track record like mine, wouldn't you want to get on my good side if you wanted your federation to be successful?

Well, he again sent his second-in-command in with these papers telling me what to do. Knowing that Russo wasn't going to show his chickenshit ass, I took a look at the script, and it had profanity all through it, and I knew exactly what was going on. Vince Russo was avoiding me because it was a power play and he was also trying to get rid of me.

Well, my forefathers didn't have me in school 24/7 for nothing when I was younger. I was now going to show the new WCW ringmaster and his clowns who was really running the circus.

When Ed Ferrara came back in the third time, I asked him to sit down. As he was getting comfortable, I was thinking, "Okay, boys, you wanna play? Here goes." I told him that I never used profanity in my interviews—ever—and that through my entire career I never followed a script. I usually didn't even know what I was going to say until I got out there. I explained to Russo's crony that my interviews were all improv.

Well, Ferrara said that he understood that, but he and Russo wanted to take the WCW in a new direction and that from now on everything was going to be scripted. I then turned to Ferrara and said that I normally didn't even tell anyone what my interviews were going to be about.

Ferrara again yessed me to death, making like he understood me and cared about what I was telling him, but he just kept telling me that he and Russo needed to know everything that was going down on the shows each night and the best way to do that was to have us follow a script. I then turned the tables on him.

I said okay, I would tell them what I was going to say. I then proceeded to ask him if he and Russo had pretty thick skin. He answered me yes and then asked why I wanted to know this. I told him that I was going to do an interview that night about them and

I didn't want to hurt their feelings. He then answered me with all the arrogance he could muster, "Thick-skinned? They've called Vince Russo and me everything you can think of; you couldn't puncture us with a ten-penny nail. We're rhino-hide tough and can resist anything thrown at us."

I said, "Well, that's good. Then you won't take any offense to my interview tonight." He then asked, "Well, what is your interview?" Now remember, folks, I was still working on this little duo of Ferrara and Russo, so again I reinforced my philosophy that I really didn't like disclosing my material, but said I'd make an exception for them even though we didn't even know one another very well. I told him that I was aware that he and Russo had been working hard and writing in New York for the last two years, making a name for themselves. He told me yeah, that that was correct. I then said, "Oh, then you must be the two motherfuckers who were responsible for writing the script that led to the tragic death of my cousin Owen Hart?"

I'm telling you, folks, a bead of sweat shot out of the right-hand side of his temple, I kid you not; I have *never* seen this before. He turned many colors, and didn't know what to say. He immediately bolted from my dressing room, and less than three minutes later, he came back with Bill Bush, who was the WCW president at the time, and Vince Russo, and they were at my door trying to talk me out of repeating what I'd said to Ferrara on television. So I guess Vince Russo *did* want to come and see me after all?

Vince Russo tried to use his best cleverness to water down my interview. I already knew that I wasn't going to mention Owen Hart. He had just passed away and I have too much respect for his family to use such a thing as a piece of business. But Russo and company didn't know this, of course. I just needed to let them know that they were playing with the big boys now. Finally I said, "I'll tell you what. I don't need to mention Hart. I'll just *incorporate* your points into the interview." I believe I succeeded in getting my point across to these know-nothings.

But instead of wasting their time trying to get me out of their federation, they should have paid more attention to their product, as the WCW with Russo and company at the helm was dying fast.

Around April 2000, the WCW had gone into a serious dive. They just weren't drawing any ratings or any money with Russo and Eric Bischoff's plan of entertainment. What they failed to realize was that on the marquees it still said wrestling, and that's what the fans really wanted to see. I was just getting over an injury to my biceps and was watching this mess unfold from the sidelines at the time when I got a call from Hogan telling me they were dying and they needed me to come back.

I told him to tell Bischoff and Russo that I was ready, but I never got a call. Finally, I called Bischoff and told him that we needed to do something here because his federation was losing it. I told him that I knew he wanted to go in a different direction with all the young guys, but his plan wasn't working. I explained to him that the veterans knew what the people wanted and that he should let us help him bring the business back up.

He then asked me what I had in mind, and before I could finish answering, he said, "Can you have a treatment on my desk by Wednesday?" When I heard this I realized that his parents must have built him a swing facing a wall. A treatment is a word used in show business for a short outline explaining what a project is about. I couldn't believe he was using this lingo with me when his federation was in the shitter. Not that I didn't know what a treatment was—I probably had done more movies at the time than Bischoff had even seen—but I told him that I would cut him a promo tape instead and would have it on his desk by 10:30 that morning.

I did the tape and FedEx'd it to him. It is probably one of the only industry tapes of its kind ever made. The first three or four minutes on the tape, I talk directly to Bischoff and Russo and tell them what's wrong with the territory and how I can help them. I then go and actually cut an interview for them.

But as I sit here now writing this book, I still have not heard back from anybody at the WCW regarding the tape, which I dubbed "The Ghost Tape" because nobody ever saw it. After about a month, I sent a fax to the WCW that said something like: "I await to hear from you regarding the tape." It was as simple as that. The only reply was a fax that listed three personal appearances in Buffalo, Denver, and Toronto that the WCW wanted me to do. Figuring they were still thinking over my game plan, I accepted the three appearances in writing through my manager, Barry Bloom. But I was baffled as to why they were taking so long to respond about the tape. The WCW was still losing the wrestling battle, and my thinking was if you've got Mickey Mantle sitting on the bench, why don't you have him pinch-hit and maybe put the team back in the game? What were these guys thinking?

Well, whatever they were thinking, people believed that they ultimately caused the demise of an American institution, the WCW, and put the federation in the hole for an estimated $87 million.

Now I find that I'm coming to the end of my story—for now—I look back over all the pages here and I realize that mine is a tale of beating the odds and winning over what was a pretty grim start to my life. But my life story is also a glimpse into the whole evolution and growth of wrestling. American wrestling in the seventies was like a gypsy camp—we would put on a show in a town and then move on to the next. Wrestling has now taken the entertainment industry by storm and is a global multibillion dollar industry.

That brings back that sorry point. While wrestling today is a huge moneymaking business, I believe many things haven't changed in the industry, and wrestlers are still being used and exploited. I certainly can't complain myself, because I've done quite well. But the average wrestler still suffers. There still doesn't seem to be a real sense of job security among average wrestlers or assurances that their families will be taken care of once they've passed on.

I would also like the moral standards of today's wrestling raised. Again, you know I'm no model of purity, but I firmly believe that wrestling needs to be fan-friendly and family-friendly entertainment.

That is why I've agreed to throw my weight behind a new federation, the XWF. I would like to compete head-on with the other federations while staying true to what the fans really want. Wrestling needs competition, and another federation is an opportunity to raise the standards, and to try and get wrestlers a better deal.

As one of the trailblazers of modern-day wrestling, I still have the power to change the game. I'm certainly not suggesting harm to any other federations—remember, I was one of the pioneers of the WWF. But all the time I've put into wrestling, and all the mental and physical pain I've been through, prove that competition is what America was built on, and competition is what makes America so great.

As this chapter comes to a close, I hope you'll see more of me in that regard in the new chapter of my wrestling career. And I hope that a higher quality of wrestling will win the hearts and minds of wrestling fans here in the U.S. and all over the world.

So, as I pull over to the curb to let you out of my car, I want you to remember that the next time you see the Yellow Canary coming your way, just stick out your thumb and I'll be ready to take you for another ride.